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# *Torre d'Aguilha 2004*



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**Cover design by  
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(Taiwan)**

**Center for Spiritan Studies  
Duquesne University**

**CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

# **GENERAL CHAPTER 2004**

**Torre d'Aguilha – Portugal**

***“Faithful to the gift entrusted to us”***

**Generalate  
Clivo di Cinna, 195  
00136 Rome**

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## **Abbreviations**

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- DO :**     **Directory for the Organisation of the Congregation**
- GSF :**     **Guide for Spiritan Formation**
- JPIC :**    **Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation**
- ND :**     **‘Notes et Documents’**
- NGO :**    **Non Governmental Organisations**
- SRL :**     **Spiritan Rule of Life**



# ***“FAITHFUL TO THE GIFT THAT HAS BEEN ENTRUSTED TO US”***

**(cf. I Tim 6.20)**

Brothers and Sisters,

When we returned from the General Chapter that took place at Torre d’Aguilha in Portugal from June 20<sup>th</sup> to July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2004, whether we were capitulants, invitees or functionaries, we had to answer the same sort of questions: “How did the Chapter go? What is new in our 300-year-old Congregation? What major, important decisions did you take for the next eight years?”

Those who have been to other General Chapters would have been struck by the ever greater diversity of the capitulants and their reduced average age. Of the 62 elected delegates, if there were still 37 originating from Europe and North America, there were also 22 from Africa and 3 from Latin America and the Caribbean. There were 25 different nationalities represented. This great diversity in our Congregation, having been illustrated by the reports of the Superior General and the General Bursar, was likewise reflected in the 17 presentations and round-table discussions, where 29 confreres and 3 Lay Associates shared their joys and concerns regarding different questions. The list of these interventions and testimonies is impressive: the Spiritan Year; contemplation and action; passing on the Spiritan charism; new commitments in Asia; inter-religious dialogue, particularly with Islam; first evangelisation; missionary support for the local Church; conflict and post-conflict situations; ministry to refugees and AIDS victims; Justice and Peace; the joys and challenges of

new and older circumscriptions; life in international communities; the vocation of Brothers; Lay Associates; *Sharelink*; archives. For somebody taking part in a General Chapter for the first time, such diversity was both a cause for admiration and a source of concern. How can we maintain unity when dealing with such a variety – or, as some would put it, such a scattering of resources? Would we not seriously disagree, in the final analysis, in trying to discern what should be regarded as priority? Would the Chapter texts, which we were to discuss and vote upon, not end up looking like lists, with each person making sure that their own particular ‘hobby-horse’ got a mention? At the crucial moment of the elections, would we not run the risk of falling short of the noble ideal of *Cor Unum et Anima Una* and descend to petty squabbles and ‘communalism’. Or, to use a Chinese expression, would we not come to look like frogs, each at the bottom of his own individual well, trying to contemplate the vast expanse of the heavens?

The risk of getting caught in these snares was considerable. The debates were sometimes lively and uncompromising, as is only right in a gathering which is not trying to avoid problems but to solve them. But the capitulants did their best to listen in a fraternal way and learnt how to preserve ‘one soul’ during the Chapter. How can we explain this?

First of all, by the quality of the welcome that we received from the confreres of the great Spiritan family in Portugal. When a united family opens its arms to you like this and goes out of its way to make you feel at home, who would dare to quarrel and divide? It is sufficient to read the appreciations and editorials that appeared in circumscription newsletters immediately after the closure of the Chapter to realise how

touched we all were by the wonderful Portuguese hospitality. Particularly impressive was the large number of committed friends of the Portuguese Spiritans who joined us on the pilgrimage to Our Lady of Fatima on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

Another factor was the important role played, for the first time in the history of our General Chapters, by the internet. Many confreres not only sent messages of support and encouragement but also actively participated in the debates. This new means of communication certainly needs to be developed in our Congregation so that there will be a larger and better participation by all in making decisions that effect everybody.

Our General Chapter certainly benefited from the climate of spiritual renewal that was generated by the celebration of the Spiritan Jubilee Year of 2002-2003. Commemorations, pilgrimages, symposia and festivities of every sort led us not so much to glory in a past that is gone forever as to question ourselves on our present fidelity to the gift we have received, to attain the spiritual heights necessary to carry out our Mission, to come to realise we are living through a time of transition – as the pre-capitular document *'Authentically Living the Spiritan Charism Today'* explained so well. It should be added that the last two General Chapters – Itaici (Brazil) in 1992 and Maynooth (Ireland) in 1998 – paid great attention to Mission and the way we wish to live it in our day, so that there seemed to be no need to return again to what is now our common vision. Another more urgent question needed to be discussed.

The fact is that at Torre d'Aguilha, it was not so much Mission that was our main concern as ourselves – the missionaries. "How to fill the gap between our vision and the

reality as we are living it”; this was the great preoccupation of the capitulants. The gathering at Torre d’Aguilha was more than a Chapter in the usual sense of the term; it was lived as an extended retreat, punctuated by fervent daily liturgies, two days of recollection at the start and in the middle and a weekend of pilgrimage to Fatima.

Nobody set themselves up as teachers for others, but everybody was anxious to learn, especially from the three Lay Associates, who told us, each in their own way, that their greatest motivation for wanting to walk alongside us was not so much the splendour of our possible apostolic exploits as the depth of our spiritual life.

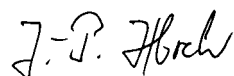
This booklet of Chapter texts that you now have in your hands is an echo of this spiritual process which so deeply marked the General Chapter. It starts with the pre-capitular document, *‘Authentically Living the Spiritan Charism Today’* and ends with a synthesis of the recollection conferences given by Fr Adelio Torres Neiva, as if to remind us that the current concept of mission demands a deeper, more contemplative spirituality on the part of the missionary. Along the same lines, the first and most important of the texts considers the *‘Spiritual Renewal of the Congregation’*. On the subject of *‘Life in International Communities’*, it is stressed that these communities are not spreading in our Congregation simply because it is the fashion, or because we have no alternative; it is above all because we want to be more faithful to the gift of God’s love. Likewise, commitment to *‘Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation’* is not possible without a ‘sound spirituality’. In the two documents devoted to the joys and challenges of new and older circumscriptions, one can find the same spiritual inspiration: our joy is in the Lord, not in our

prestigious past or our promising future. Our trust is in Him, despite the drought and our poverty. In a telling way, the first guideline on the subject of formation affirms that “*holiness of life and a spirit of sacrifice in the service of mission are paramount for Spiritan formation... Special attention will be given to the spirituality of our founders*”. More technical and apparently more down-to-earth, the last two documents on Finance and the modifications to the Rule of Life also show the necessity of spiritual renewal. In the section entitled ‘*Other Documents*’, you will find a fine passage by Pierre Schouver on the ‘one big family’ that is the Congregation, a text on Lay Associates, another on relations with Islam and a letter from the Chapter to the older confreres of the Congregation.

The task confided to the Chapter Texts Committee was not too difficult; the various text committees and translators at the Chapter had already done much of the work. All that was needed was to retouch some of the introductions (they are all printed in italics in this booklet) or to compose new ones where they did not already exist – especially for the two texts on the Rule of Life and Finance. The Committee also paid attention to the style, without changing the sense, and occasionally re-organised the material in a more coherent and readable form.

Finally, a word on the illustration on the cover of this booklet. The vast expanse of sea and the terra firma in the background recall the themes of the two previous General Chapters: “*Where is the Spirit leading us?*” (Itaici) and “*Launch out into the deep*” (Maynooth). This reminds us that a General Chapter is always situated in a particular time frame, that it is another stage in the long pilgrimage which for the last 300 years has led our Congregation to meet the Lord in the

least of our brothers and sisters. The triple light of the sun, of the paschal candle (which burnt in front of the Seminary of Torre d'Aguilha throughout the length of the Chapter) and the small night-lights of the Spiritans scattered over the map of the earth, all remind us of the fundamental objective of our recent General Chapter: to re-light in each of us and throughout the Congregation this spiritual flame, without which we can neither be authentic disciples of Poullart des Places and Libermann nor credible witnesses to the love of God, manifested in Jesus Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J.-P. Hoch". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Jean-Paul Hoch, CSSp.  
Superior General

# AUTHENTICALLY LIVING THE SPIRITAN CHARISM TODAY

*"Faithful to the gift entrusted to us" (1 Tim. 6,20)*

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*This document came to birth when the former General Council began a reflection arising from its experiences of the Congregation over the last years – with a special focus on certain areas of concern. Many of these were reinforced by issues raised from the replies to the questionnaire sent out prior to the General Chapter.*

*It was then decided to ask a number of the participants coming to the Chapter to give a short presentation on a particular selected topic linked directly to the concerns raised in this document. The speakers were asked to give their presentations on the basis of their own concrete experiences in their circumscription.<sup>1</sup>*

*Even if the document 'Authentically Living the Spiritan Charism' is not quoted by name in the texts produced by the General Chapter, it is no less true that the concerns expressed in this document are the ones that the capitulants addressed. This is the reason why it has been placed as the introduction to all the Chapter texts.*

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<sup>1</sup> These presentations will be published in a future edition of 'Spiritan Life'.

## **0.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In approaching this General Chapter, we are mindful that it comes just a year after the closure of our Spiritan Year. During that special time of grace, the focus of the Congregation was on the celebration of the anniversaries of our co-founders. We reflected on how Spiritans faced up to the challenges of mission in each generation, during the 300 years since our foundation. Far from provoking a feeling of nostalgia for the past, the anniversary events and celebrations gave an added impetus to the ongoing challenge for the Congregation to rediscover the charism and intuitions of our founders in the context of the contemporary world (SRL 2). We are convinced that this General Chapter should further the process of renewal begun during the Spiritan year.

During these last six years we have tried to implement the great challenges of our last Chapter at Maynooth where, “We felt we were being called to new and radical options... in the service of the most abandoned, to a greater co-operation with others, to a fraternal life lived in our Institute and, through all this, to an authentic spiritual life.”<sup>2</sup> We have endeavoured to listen to where the Spirit is leading us and have ‘launched out into the deep’ with a number of new mission initiatives. The ship pulls into port again here in Lisbon as we try to examine, assess and learn from how we have journeyed together as a Congregation during these past six years.

The agenda is thus made up of your experiences and ours over the course of this period. The responses returned to the questionnaire have, to a large extent, resonated with many of our own thoughts and experiences as a Council. From these we have brought together three core areas for the agenda we are proposing for your discussion and deliberation:

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<sup>2</sup> Preface to Maynooth 1998 Chapter Documents, Fr Pierre Schouver.



- ✧ **Re-discovering Spiritan Apostolic Life in the Contemporary World;**
- ✧ **The Changing Face of the Congregation: Our Increasingly International Membership;**
- ✧ **Maintaining Unity in an Increasingly Diversified Congregation.**

We feel that the vision for the life and mission of the Congregation articulated at Maynooth remains as valid today as it was six years ago. A strong consensus has emerged from your feedback and from our own experience that it is time to look more closely at some of the issues that affect significantly how we live the vision of Maynooth. Many have called for a bridging of the gap between our vision and our lived reality. The call is for this Chapter to focus primarily on the agents of evangelisation, as the three points above would suggest. However, in proposing this, we are convinced that the fruits of our discussions will have strong implications for our mission *ad gentes*; they can bring to light and, hopefully, to some form of shared resolution, the ‘pebbles in our shoes’ that frustrate and hold us back from following more faithfully the charisms of our founders. There may also be implications for Spiritan formation and how it is organised, for Spiritan community living, for our level of solidarity, and for the overall organisational structure of the Congregation.

## 0.2 RE-DISCOVERING SPIRITAN APOSTOLIC LIFE IN THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

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*“The ‘apostolic life’ is at the heart of our  
Spiritan vocation.” (SRL 3)*

*“The same Spirit who calls us to mission also calls us  
to community.” (Maynooth 0.4.3)*

### 0.2.1 Spiritan Apostolic Life

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Our consecrated life, lived in community, is at the service of mission. We go to “those who have not yet heard the Gospel message... those oppressed and most disadvantaged... where the Church has difficulties in finding workers.”<sup>3</sup> We recognise, however, that each generation of Spiritans has to develop its own policy of how best to respond to these challenges in the light of changing circumstances. Today, we believe we are being called to a new approach and style of mission. Conscious that Christ’s Spirit is already present and active in the cultures to which we are sent, mission becomes a pilgrimage of mutual enrichment, where together we identify and seek liberation from the chains that impede the full realisation of God’s Kingdom. We celebrate this *Missio Dei* that we have inherited, in the sacramental life of the Church. This understanding of mission today requires of missionaries a deeper, more contemplative spirituality.

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<sup>3</sup> SRL 12.

## 0.2.2 Spiritan Consecrated Life

In your feedback to us, many confreres, inspired by our founders, expressed a desire to return to a deeper understanding of our consecrated life as an essential dimension in the living out of our Spiritan mission. Confreres want to rediscover the centrality of their personal consecration to God through religious life, lived according to the Spiritan charism. Today, more than ever perhaps, we are conscious of our fragility and our ‘feet of clay’, and that we all require the supportive atmosphere of true community living in order to help us remain faithful to our Spiritan calling. Being Spiritan means cultivating an attitude of openness and docility to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our lives, of attentiveness to the signs of the times, of availability for mission in a spirit of *paratus ad omnia* where the requests of our legitimate superiors and the needs of contemporary mission are concerned.<sup>4</sup>

## 0.2.3 Spiritan Community Life

We have also noticed a strong call in your replies to revisit the area of community living starting from the point of view of our lived reality.<sup>5</sup> We primarily give witness to the Gospel message and Kingdom values in our Spiritan community life. What we preach should reflect a reality that we already live. It is in community that we come to acquire the spiritual skills of patience and tolerance of differences so necessary in the contemporary world. Community life, however, is not something that occurs automatically once a number of Spiritans live

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<sup>4</sup> See ‘Chapter Directives and Decisions’ nos. 22 and 28 (General Chapter 1968-1969).

<sup>5</sup> See Superior General’s Report to Maynooth 1998, no. 4.4.3: “*Many of the replies to the pre-capitular questionnaire see a renewal of community life as one of the major subjects to be faced.*”

under the same roof. Community building has to be worked at and the contribution of each member to this process is considered vital to healthy community life and personal growth. Leadership has an essential role to play in the organisation of community and in the structures to be put in place in order to facilitate openness and sharing. Each member of a community is to be treated with genuine equality and respect. The above is even more important when it comes to intercultural and international community living and care should be taken to ensure that those who are appointed to such communities are properly prepared and have demonstrated an aptitude for this style of community.<sup>6</sup>

#### **0.2.4 Challenges**

A major concern for us as a Congregation must be the increasing individualism that is taking root in many circumscriptions. Some confreres make their plans with little if any reference to their legitimate superiors or the other members of their communities. They forget that mission is something that we as Spiritans are entrusted with and not something that we give ourselves. Some choose apostolates primarily for personal financial gain rather than ones that would be more in line with our charism. These, and other irregularities, if unchecked, seriously call into question how we understand our commitment to the vows of poverty and obedience, not to mention our commitment to Spiritan mission. While acknowledging the serious personnel needs for formation and administrative posts in many circumscriptions, one notes a temptation (on the part of some superiors) to recall confreres (even on first appointment) to their circumscription of origin without observing due process.

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<sup>6</sup> See Maynooth 3.8-3.15; 4.1-4.18.

If such decisions are taken unilaterally, without adequate dialogue and the required permission of the superior of the circumscription to which the confrere has been appointed, the stability of our mission commitments can be seriously undermined.

### **0.2.5 Our Spiritan Identity**

The question must be asked again as to the degree our living together in community is experienced as a source of inspiration for our mission or as a simple arrangement of convenience.<sup>7</sup> What is at stake is who we are as Spiritans, what identifies us as Spiritans, what it is about us that holds true and remains valid in all continents. Our younger confreres are especially anxious to see these issues addressed. If a failure at leadership level contributes to any of the concerns expressed above, then these will have to be an issue of concern for this Chapter. Some responses have called into question the leadership style of some superiors especially when it comes to intercultural and international communities.

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<sup>7</sup> See Maynooth 3.8.

### 0.3 THE CHANGING FACE OF THE CONGREGATION: OUR INCREASINGLY INTERNATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

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*“The Spirit calls us to continual conversion, shapes our personal and community lives, makes us partakers in the death and resurrection mystery of Jesus and prepares us to make the total gift of ourselves for the Kingdom.” (SRL 10)*

*“We will look for ways to increase our solidarity both within and between regions. This sharing in personnel and finance...comes from our mutual concern and respect for each other as brothers and sisters sharing the one mission.” (Maynooth 4.25)*

#### **0.3.1 Spiritan Demographic Shift**

At Maynooth it was recognised that there is a significant demographic shift taking place in the Congregation. Traditionally centred in the ‘North’, the reality today is of declining numbers there with a corresponding expansion and growth in the ‘South’, especially in Africa (Maynooth 0.1.2). This development, taken together with the evolution of mission itself, whereby many local Churches in our traditional missionary countries are approaching self-sufficiency in terms of personnel, has led to a more diversified Congregation. Today we are spread throughout the world in smaller and more international groups than in the past. This presents new challenges to the quality of our relations in community, in our practice of solidarity, in the exercise of authority (Maynooth 0.2.1). The quality of our witness in these areas just mentioned, among others, will

often determine the authenticity of the message we proclaim to the many communities and cultures we go to.

### **0.3.2 Positive Aspects**

In many of your replies, the continued international development of the Congregation has been seen as positive in general. This is again reflected in the responses to the questionnaire sent out in preparation for I/D 59, a survey which also identifies the challenges inherent in international community living. The numerical decline of the provinces in the 'North', has led to closer collaboration among these circumscriptions regarding their future commitments. Mission projects are being co-sponsored and supported by the participating circumscriptions and the growth towards a degree of regionalisation continues. Some confreres from the younger provinces work in these newer projects in collaboration with confreres from the region. In the younger provinces and foundations, the numbers continue to grow with the result that a significant majority of our first appointments each year are from these circumscriptions. Meanwhile, conscious of their senior age profile and the increasing number of confreres retiring to their circumscriptions of origin, many Districts have recognised the need to integrate their resources into the development of new foundations and provinces in these areas.

### **0.3.3 Emerging Issues**

Despite the generally positive picture, tensions arise as part of this transition. Many of your replies call for the genuine inculturation of the Spiritan charism in the context of local culture. Some of the more experienced confreres are concerned about how we can successfully communicate our Spiritan heritage to a new generation.

The concern is that the 'South' may, with time, fail to fully appreciate its 'Northern' Spiritan roots and heritage. At the same time, our confreres from the 'South' are genuinely searching for an authentic expression of the Spiritan charism and identity in their local culture. Our younger provinces and foundations experience great difficulties in finding the resources to run, among other needs, their formation houses. The economic profile of the countries where many of our new foundations and provinces exist today makes financial self sufficiency in the short term an unrealisable goal. Some feel that, despite the needs of the 'Northern' provinces, resources could arguably be more generously shared. Is the current financial organisation of the Congregation based on the idea of solidarity sufficient to meet the increasing demands? How do we find a balance between trying to meet the short term needs of a circumscription with its long term responsibility to acquire adequate financial independence and stability? These questions ultimately concern our equality as members of the same Congregation and our ability to build a sense of trust and co-responsibility between one another.



## 0.4 MAINTAINING UNITY IN AN INCREASINGLY DIVERSIFIED CONGREGATION

*“While respectful of its diversity, the General Council safeguards the unity of the Congregation... it watches over the work of the circumscriptions and their faithfulness to the Spiritan calling... It works for the growth of the Institute and promotes new initiatives in mission.” (SRL 199.1)*

*“Confreres will take a genuine interest in each other’s work and those working together will do so as a team and not as individuals.” (Maynooth 3.9)*

### 0.4.1 Our Continuing Expansion

At Maynooth, the Chapter urged us to ‘launch out into the deep’ in a spirit of openness to the action and call of the Holy Spirit despite our limitations in personnel and finance. During the past six years, we have taken on new missions in the Seychelles, Benin, Bolivia, and Equatorial Guinea, in response to requests from these local Churches. We are about to open a new mission in the Dominican Republic. We have been approached to take on other missions in Honduras, Liberia and Burundi. Some of your replies to the questionnaire asked for more clarity around the criteria we employ in accepting to open a new mission, especially regarding sustainability. There were also worries that, in the diversity of mission situations arising in so called ‘first-world’ countries, we may be in danger of losing our traditional commitment to mission *ad extra*. There is a voice emerging from your feedback suggesting that perhaps it is time to stop, reflect and reinforce existing works before proceeding to open any

further new ones. Some fear that in the diversity of the commitments we have undertaken and the intercultural nature of the communities we have created, our unity as a Congregation may be compromised.

### **0.4.2 Our Vision of Mission**

Because the local Churches in many of the traditional 'missionary' countries have developed to the point where they themselves are now sending missionaries *ad extra*, a renewed spirituality and practice of mission is needed. Concepts like respectful dialogue, presence, solidarity, justice and peace ministry, collaboration are increasingly invoked today as essential aspects of modern mission. Given the intercultural makeup of many of our communities and the particularity of local circumstances, allowance must still be made for the validity of a variety of approaches to mission. However, we must not lose sight of the fundamental orientations and vision of mission articulated at Maynooth.<sup>8</sup> In this context a number of confreres have called for a clearer articulation of our Spiritan charism and identity.

### **0.4.3 Formation for Mission**

Another issue that arises is whether our present organisational structure in the Congregation is suitable for the increasing diversity of our communities and commitments. Is it time to consider a more centralised model? This seems especially acute when we consider the area of formation. There are many calls for a closer look at how we form our young confreres. Are we forming and preparing our students for the vision of mission as outlined at Maynooth? How can we better prepare them for life in

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<sup>8</sup> Maynooth 2.1, 2.2, 2.7, 2.17.

an international community? As the number of local formation programmes increases, there continues to be a serious need for formators throughout the Congregation. The present system would appear to be unsustainable in the longer term. Various possible solutions have been proposed, especially for 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle: the rationalisation of our formation houses, where possible around consortia involving other missionary Congregations; the placing of 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle formation directly under the responsibility of the Generalate, with the possibility of creating a number of international houses of formation. These would have the advantage of ensuring a better preparation for internationality, provide for a more unified approach to the communication of our charism to future generations of Spiritans and give greater stability in regard to the provision of formation personnel. However, there would be serious financial implications if the above suggestion was adopted.

#### **0.4.4 A Call to Unity**

The international, intercultural and inter-generational makeup of many of the communities in our circumscriptions today means that conflict can arise easily. Apart from differences in theological outlook, tension can result, for example, from the unredeemed neo-colonial attitudes of some confreres towards others. Some of our younger confreres experience prejudice and distrust in the communities they are appointed to, especially when the composition is both international and inter-generational. At times they are under-resourced to carry out their mission and sometimes kept in the dark as regards the financial resources at the disposal of the community for its apostolic life. Other confreres, from their experience, question the financial accountability of some of our younger confreres, especially those from the

southern hemisphere. Some older confreres can feel uncomfortable and perhaps threatened by a perceived African 'take-over' of the Congregation and thus may respond inappropriately to the impending changes ahead. They can feel insecure in the new emerging reality of the Congregation, with the perceived loosening of the bonds between a confrere and his circumscription 'of origin' with the movement towards the phasing out of Districts in progress. Dissociation from community life and the community project can often be the result of such unresolved tensions, thus putting the unity of our apostolic life at risk.

**PART I**

**CHAPTER  
DOCUMENTS**



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# 1. SPIRITUAL RENEWAL OF THE CONGREGATION

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**T**he Spiritan charism is a gift that shines through our founders and other Spiritans and touches and enriches us. It challenges us to be faithful in an age when the call to authenticity is one of the signs of the times.<sup>9</sup> The charism is the guarantee of unity as great diversity emerges within the Congregation. In this task, the Maynooth Chapter reminds us that “the Spirit goes ahead of us on the path of mission, and signs of His presence accompany our work.”<sup>10</sup> We are called to be “faithful to the gift entrusted to us.” (1 Tim. 6.20)

Reflecting on our charism is not an exercise of wishful thinking and dwelling on the past for its own sake but of rediscovering the charism and intuitions of our founders in the context of the contemporary world.<sup>11</sup> Our identity depends on being rooted in our tradition. It is the side-mirror on the past that helps to move us forward with greater clarity and security. However, we are called to be faithful to our tradition in a way that is both alive and creative. We continue to “launch out into the deep”, discerning the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit, through the signs of the times around us.

During the Spiritan Jubilee Year we reflected on how Spiritans faced up to the challenges of mission in each succeeding generation during the 300 years since our foundation. It was

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 76.

<sup>10</sup> Maynooth 1998, No. 2, p. 99.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. SRL 2.

also an experience of discovering new ways of transmitting this rich inheritance to others. This has created a favourable climate for identifying more clearly the central elements of our Spiritan spirituality in which “we live out our mission in willing obedience to the Holy Spirit, taking Mary as our model” (SRL 5). The following text does not try to touch on all aspects of Spiritan spirituality. It emphasises some elements that have a special relevance for living our Spiritan spirituality in the contemporary world.

## 1.1 IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF SPIRITAN SPIRITUALITY

### 1.1.1 Practical Union with God

For Libermann sanctity and the gift of self were essential elements of the spirituality of his missionaries. He called this “practical union with God”. We must remain united to Christ, like the graft on the trunk of the tree, so that the sap of life can produce fruit; its strength will depend on the quality of this relationship.<sup>12</sup> For this union to take place, personal and community prayer, as outlined in SRL, are important. We are called in many situations of our apostolic life to await “the moment of God”.

The gift of self was expressed in a special way when we committed ourselves by a public and definitive act to a life of chastity, poverty and obedience, in order to give witness to the Gospel values in the world. When lived with joy and authenticity, the vows free us to serve God and others in a more radical way. The vow of obedience frees us from our inborn longings for power and the vow of poverty from

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. “Instructions to missionaries”, in *“Ecrits Spirituels”* (Paris 1891) p. 420-421.



our inner longings for possessions. The vow of chastity frees us for a love that is genuine.<sup>13</sup> While recognising that we are fragile people who carry a treasure in vessels of clay, we are called by the Spirit to correct irregularities such as individualism, inappropriate relationships, and the lack of transparency and accountability in the use of money and inequalities between confreres, communities and circumscriptions. We are called, acknowledging our faults and failings, to live lives of integrity.

### **1.1.2 Life in Community**

Libermann opted for religious life and community: “*All the members will always live in community*” (*Règlements* of 1849). What we preach should reflect a reality that we already live. Only in this way is the Gospel message credible. Community and mission go hand in hand. Our consecrated life, lived in community is at the service of mission, without which it can become sterile. Mission without community, on the other hand, does not communicate a credible Church. In our missionary task, we are conscious of our fragility and our ‘feet of clay’, and that we all require the supportive atmosphere of true community living in order to help us remain faithful to our Spiritan calling.

Community living helps us to grow. In community we are obliged to listen to other ideas and perspectives; we cannot impose our own vision of things. God allows us to be pruned by others so that we can give greater fruit and become strength for the group. In community we learn to serve and our personal gifts are recognised and welcomed as a service to all. In prayer and reflection, the calls of God are discerned and the common mission is accepted

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. “A Love that is Genuine, a Call to Integrity in our Relationships”.

and shared. More and more confreres live in international communities that offer us a special challenge to give witness in a world often divided on racial and ethnic lines.

However, there is often a difference between the ideal and the lived reality. The ideal is important; it encourages us to strive for greater perfection in real life situations where tensions and conflicts are part of the human condition and can have redemptive and maturing value. Nevertheless, community building does not take place spontaneously but has to be worked at.

### **1.1.3 Missionary Spirituality**

Our spirituality is missionary. The missionary orientation of Claude Poullart des Places was also taken up by Libermann. At that time Spiritans set out not just from Europe to other continents but also from parishes to those who were outside its reach. “The apostolic life is at the heart of our Spiritan vocation” (SRL 3).

The apostolic life embraces two aspects: availability before the Lord and availability before humanity. This is captured by the words of the prophet Isaiah: “Here I am Lord, send me”. The spread of individualism among some Spiritans makes this an urgent challenge. Mission is something we receive, not something we choose.

Mission involves inculturation and being aware that the Spirit is already present and active in the cultures to which we are sent. Mission becomes a pilgrimage of mutual enrichment, where together we identify and seek liberation from the chains that impede the full realisation of God’s Kingdom. Libermann reminds his missionaries: to “become Negro with the Negroes, to form them appropriately, not in the European manner but leaving

them what belongs to them”.<sup>14</sup> Moreover our experiences show us that our spirituality is deepened by the people we minister to.

#### **1.1.4 Option for the Poor**

It is the option for the poor that makes us different in a society that excludes large sectors of the population. Des Places’ renouncing of the possibilities of a brilliant career and money given by his father and decision to live with the poor seminarians challenges the values of our surrounding consumer society culture. He wanted his work to be God’s work. Attention to the poorest and most abandoned is at the heart of the intuition of both Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann. This is an important criterion for our lifestyle and discerning the works we take on.

The option for the poor means allowing these intuitions of the founders to challenge our attitudes, the choices we make and the work we do, while, at the same time, integrating important insights of modern social sciences with regard to poverty. We need to distinguish between ‘poverty suffered’ and ‘poverty chosen’. While ‘poverty suffered’ is a social evil to be overcome, ‘poverty chosen’ is a virtue that involves the choice of a simple lifestyle as a sign of solidarity with the poor in their struggle to transform their situation. The option for the poor involves working for justice and peace and the integrity of creation. To empower poor people we need to avoid creating situations of paternalism and dependency. Money from outside can help, but it can also do much harm.

We need to acquire the tools of social analysis in order not to repeat previous errors. In the past, the Church has

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<sup>14</sup> “*Notes et Documents*”, IX (1847) p. 330.

sometimes found itself in a position of preaching an abstract option for the poor while supporting unjust cultural, economic and political structures. These structures in fact made it impossible for the poor to move from exclusion to inclusion in society. The lack of credibility of the institution today in many sectors of the modern and post-modern world can be traced to such situations in the past. The relevance of the Church in the contemporary world is at stake. As an international congregation, we are called to play a role in establishing a more just relationship between developed and developing countries.

### **1.1.5 Spiritan Spirituality Is About Service**

“The Spirit calls us to continual conversion, shapes our personal and community lives, makes us partakers in the death and resurrection mystery of Jesus and prepares us to make the total gift of ourselves for the Kingdom” (SRL 10). Part of this call involves generating an attitude of service and respect for others, otherwise it is not a genuine Christian vocation. In some situations candidates can be attracted by the ‘sacred powers’ attached to the priesthood. A surrounding clerical culture and model of Church can also have a very negative influence, producing attitudes that are authoritarian and paternalistic and that make teamwork, collaborative ministry and community living difficult, especially after ordination. These attitudes are further strengthened when the emphasis is placed on clerical life at the expense of religious life. SRL 2 reminds us that we respond to the call of God as a religious missionary institute.

The Christian notion of power is one of service. The priest is a pastor who gives his life for his flock. Jesus demands a revolutionary change in the concept of power: His

disciples must not imitate the princes of this world who use power to dominate. Those who are the first are to be the servants of all.<sup>15</sup> The priest is not defined by power but by a gift received for the service of others; he is a minister. One has to cast doubts on the lifestyle of a priest which is not consistent with the theology of the Church and with Spiritan spirituality.

Changing attitudes can also be helped by training confreres in the skills of collaborative ministry<sup>16</sup>: skills of group dynamics, teamwork, listening, co-ordinating meetings, planning, evaluating, and motivating people. Many lack these skills and so have difficulty in empowering lay people and working in a non-authoritarian and non-paternalistic way.

## 1.2 THE HANDING ON OF THE CHARISM

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The handing on of the charism of the Congregation is the transmission of a gift from God, given to us through our founders. It is passed on in a style of living together and working for the Kingdom, by the study of its foundation and history applied to our way of life and spirituality, and by a variety of creative means, some of which were used during our Jubilee celebrations.

**The Charism has to be lived and incarnated to be effective.** The handing on of the charism of the Congregation is not just a matter of study but has to be lived and incarnated to be effective. We learn from those with whom we live. Confreres will be role models for young people with regard to the lived out reality of the Spiritan charism. The charism is carried forward in the way we live, the way we pray and participate in

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Matthew 20.25-28.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Maynooth 5.

the mission of the Church and the whole Congregation. That which began through the power of the Spirit with the founders must be received, followed and developed by each succeeding generation in the different historical, social and cultural situations in which they find themselves. It is not a question of returning to the time of our foundations, but rather of living the charism today as the founders would live it in our place: to dare to take new initiatives and run certain risks – in fidelity to the grace that has been given us.

**Study of our Foundations.** The Spiritan charism cannot become an integral part of our way of life and mission without knowledge of the founders, their spiritual experience and the history of the foundation. So, basic texts need to be made available to Spiritans and the lay people who are part of our wider Spiritan family. However the historical gap needs to be bridged by presenting Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann as real people whose intuitions and actions inspire a new generation of Spiritans. We are not just passing on theoretical knowledge, but also practical approaches: openness to the Spirit, availability, going to the poor, simplicity, community life, welcoming others, and missionary witness. The Spiritan Rule of Life as it evolved through the centuries and our Chapter Documents are important parts of this inheritance. These need to become a reference point for our lives. The period of initial formation is a key moment for passing on this charism to younger confreres, but ongoing formation in this area is also important.

**Giving continuity to our Jubilee Celebrations.** The Jubilee Celebrations were a joyful discovery of many new ways of passing on the Spiritan inheritance, an inheritance that is not static but dynamic. Lay people discovered that they were part of the Spiritan family and embraced its charism with enthusiasm. We must not wait for the next 300 years to celebrate again.

## 1.3 GUIDELINES

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**1.3.1** The spiritual life opens us to the spirit of Jesus. Our Rule of Life determines some means to nourish our spiritual life. The Chapter reminds all Spiritans what the Rule of Life says to us (SRL 83-89).

**1.3.2** The passing on of the Spiritan Charism involves, among other things, telling the stories of the founders and other Spiritans who lived out this spirituality in their work. This can be done by inviting older Spiritans to speak in our formation houses but also by telling these stories through modern means of communication: magazines, internet, websites, radio and television.

**1.3.3** Our experts in Spiritan spirituality are getting older. We need to prepare a new generation of confreres who can study and pass on this inheritance to others.

**1.3.4** The passing on of the Spiritan Charism and inheritance is often limited to the novitiate. A systematic programme could be organised by the Congregation for confreres to renew their Spiritan inheritance. This could be done in conjunction with an existing institute that already offers wider renewal courses for people going on sabbaticals.

**1.3.5** It is important that we preserve the fruits of the Spiritan Jubilee Year. So we encourage initiatives that ensure a constant process of renewal both for Spiritans and for the lay people working with us.

**1.3.6** We need to prepare confreres, especially those appointed to international communities, for the difficult task of entering into the process of cultural interaction.

This calls for both an understanding of the anthropological tools necessary to work in the context of different cultures and an awareness of the theological notion and practice of inculturation of the Gospel.

**1.3.7** Confreres who have a position of authority in the Congregation have special responsibilities and roles. They have the task of helping confreres to be faithful to their vocation, and, if necessary, questioning them with regard to this fidelity. They encourage confreres to adopt a rhythm of life that is balanced and regular, giving adequate time to prayer, reflection and rest, as well as work.

Superiors promote, in different ways, a type of community living that facilitates the emotional balance of confreres, makes for an open and easy dialogue in the field of relationships, and favours a joyful and positive living of the vows, especially chastity.

**1.3.8** It is the responsibility of major superiors to make contact with confreres who do not have any official appointment from the Congregation. They will also contact confreres who have ceased to take part in the life of the circumscription to which they belong and those failing to share in that minimum of activities expected in a local or regional community.

They ask them to regularise their situation, return to their community and accept an appointment, in a spirit of availability that is at the heart of the Christian vocation. It is imperative that these irregular situations are not prolonged indefinitely.



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## 2. LIFE IN INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITIES

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*L*ife in community is a gift of God the Father through his self-communication in the Son by the Holy Spirit, inviting us to share in that communion which is the life of the Blessed Trinity. It is sustained by the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ who “lives forever to intercede for them” (Heb 7:25). “May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you...so that the world may believe it was you who sent me” (Jn 17:21).

*For Libermann, community was essential for Spiritans to carry out the mission entrusted to them. Today, confreres around the world are extending his vision to our new international communities, which they see as crucial to our future mission. This message is clear from the Pre-Chapter document “Authentically Living our Spiritan Charism Today”, the report of the Superior General and the presentations on this topic at the Chapter from South Africa, the Philippines, Mexico and Paraguay.<sup>17</sup>*

*The capitulants stressed that a good community life helps us to remain confident in difficult missionary situations, to avoid becoming bitter, preoccupied with ourselves and perhaps looking elsewhere for compensations. Our communities are*

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<sup>17</sup> Earlier references to this important topic can be found in SRL 141; Itaici 3.1; Maynooth 4.16; Directory for the Organisation of the Congregation 21-23; The Guide for Spiritan Formation 67; I/D 59, December 2001.

*becoming increasingly international and intercultural, giving them an added witness value; but in our efforts to build up these communities, we must be on our guard against the current tendency towards increasing individualism.<sup>18</sup> Good international communities do not come about by accident: they have to be worked at by each member.*

*The following guidelines were drawn up by the Chapter to direct these efforts:*

## **The Call**

**2.1** Life in international communities is increasingly important for us Spiritans. It is a response to the call of the Holy Spirit to all of us, to witness to a new quality of human solidarity surpassing individualism, ethnocentrism and nationalism.

**2.2** It is an intensification of the vocation we have received to live the common life. It invites us to develop a spirit of openness to other people as a gift from God, respecting the unique human journey of each one.

**2.3** The regular meetings of the community require the same openness, adaptability and a desire for an ever-deeper level of communication. They will include faith-sharing, theological reflection on our shared experience among the people we serve and a frequent evaluation of the quality of our community life. Each member is called to be personally committed to this process.

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Superior General's Report 4.3 and "Authentically Living the Spiritan Charism Today" 1.4.

## Mission

**2.4** Those appointed to international groups and communities, especially younger confreres, need an accompaniment at the initial stages which values the gifts of each individual. They will be given a clear explanation of the missionary project entrusted to the circumscription by the Congregation, accepting it as their own and respecting the experience and missionary journey of the circumscription they are joining.

**2.5** Normally there will be at least two confreres from a participating circumscription in any given international group.

**2.6** When an international group is being formed for a new missionary situation, the members of this new group will be given adequate time for community building.

**2.7** It is important that there be regular communication between confreres in international communities and the leadership in their circumscriptions of origin.

Before the arrival of a new confrere in an international group, his *curriculum vitae* and any other relevant information will be communicated to the superior of the receiving circumscription. Confidentiality will be respected.

**2.8** Each community will make a serious effort at inculturation, including language-learning and a respectful adaptation to the local customs and social reality, as a prerequisite for seeking to understand the local culture in the light of the Gospel. This commitment, undertaken by all, will also help to produce deeper feelings of equality and solidarity within the group.

**2.9** A sustained, long-term commitment to the common mission and to the welfare of the people we serve is more likely to facilitate a sense of brotherhood and a serious

dedication to building a genuine community life. It is through this commitment to the people and to our life in common that we exemplify the vision that we propose to others.

## **Finance**

**2.10** Life in an international community needs an understanding of the vow of poverty that is shared by all. Each of us is called to a life of evangelical simplicity. Disparities in access to and the management of financial resources can be a cause of tension and inequality. As in any other community, an international community will have a common fund administered with transparency, co-responsibility, equity and accountability.<sup>19</sup>

**2.11** Community discernment is required before an individual confrere acquires and administers major funding.

## **Initial Formation**

**2.12** The formation programme will normally include a period of missionary experience<sup>20</sup> (SRL 136), lived in community at the service of poor people of another culture; later on, an opportunity will be provided to evaluate and reflect in depth on this experience.

**2.13** Valuing international community living has important implications for formation which must itself become intercultural, especially at the level of second cycle. A formation community will share out responsibility for its organisation and financing as a training for transparency.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. SRL 69.

<sup>20</sup> Different words are used in the Congregation to describe this experience: *Stage, O.T.P., P.E.P., Prefecting*.

Particular attention will be given to the social sciences and to a model of theology that is mediated by social analysis and cultural anthropology; the aim of this is to develop an openness to the richness of other cultures and a deeper appreciation of one's own, and to reflect upon them from a socio-theological viewpoint.

**2.14** The proposed 'centralisation' of second cycle formation will be conceived, amongst other things, as a preparation of young confreres for international community living at the service of the poor in a transcultural situation.

### **On-going Formation**

**2.15** Formators, lecturers and future community leaders will receive special preparation, including a prior experience of living in an international community so that they can facilitate this process for others.

**2.16** Not all confreres find it easy to live in international communities and some older members are reluctant to accept such an appointment. But the wisdom and experience of senior confreres are needed in these communities to which the Spirit is calling us, so on-going formation will include an inter-cultural dimension to help them overcome such reticence.

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### 3. JUSTICE, PEACE AND THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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*During the General Chapter in Torre d'Aguilha various delegates shared the experiences of our confreres working in situations where injustice is rampant and deep pain and suffering are unfortunately part of the daily reality of the people to whom they minister. The final Chapter documents ask us repeatedly to live our missionary call to be the "advocates, supporters and defenders of the weak"<sup>21</sup> in the concrete situations in which we Spiritans find ourselves in today's world. Appropriately, we were also reminded during the Chapter retreat that to live this call "we need a solid spirituality of conflict, of justice and peace, of the periphery, of risk".*

*Apart from the specific guidelines on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) voted on by the delegates and contained in the various official final documents, the members of the Chapter showed their approval for the following guidelines for Spiritan JPIC commitment during the coming years:*

#### **GUIDELINES**

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**3.1** All Spiritans are asked to recognise the call to mission in today's 'Areopagus' (Acts 17: 22-31), and the importance of

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<sup>21</sup> Rule of 1849; ND X 517; SRL 14.

answering the new calls, challenges and possibilities being offered. Special attention is drawn to tasks such as peace building, conflict resolution, reconciliation, dialogue, lobbying and advocacy in favour of the poor and marginalised, work for liberation of the oppressed and for the integrity of creation.

**3.2** Maynooth 2.17 called on each circumscription to draw up a programme for Justice and Peace. This programme will be prepared, published and implemented during the next four years.

**3.3** Spiritan ministry to AIDS victims is part of our mission today. The Chapter encourages and supports confreres working in this difficult ministry and asks the JPIC office in the Generalate to promote a process of networking, mutual support and sharing amongst confreres ministering in this area.

**3.4** Collaboration with other groups and organisations (including Church groups and NGOs) will be central to our efforts to defend the poor and marginalised and to promote their rights. Of special importance here is networking, lobbying and advocacy. New and important opportunities for Spiritan mission are now emerging in this area, such as our presence at the United Nations. Some Spiritans will be trained in these new specialised areas of mission.

**3.5** In initial and on-going formation, special emphasis will be given to JPIC and it will be adequately treated in the academic programme. OTP<sup>22</sup> and other pastoral opportunities will also give special attention to JPIC during formation. Ongoing formation, retreats and meetings at community and circumscription levels can provide opportunities for updating on JPIC issues: they can also be occasions for renewal in areas

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<sup>22</sup> Also called PEP, Prefecting and 'Stage'.

of the spirituality and methodology underlying our mission to the poor and marginalised.

**3.6** Increasing violence, injustices and conflicts provoke profound human suffering. We need to be conscious that Spiritans engaged in ministry to such victims can become traumatised. Spiritan leadership will ensure that confreres wounded by such experiences and ministry will receive the necessary support and care without delay.





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## 4. JOYS AND CHALLENGES OF NEW CIRCUMSCRIPTIONS

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*The development of the Congregation in Africa, the Indian Ocean, Latin America, Asia and Oceania became a focus for the Chapter's attention. In 1974, there were 102 professed Spiritans from Africa; in 2004, there are 1054, more than a third of the total number in our Congregation. They are playing a significant part in our mission on all the continents.*<sup>23</sup>

New circumscriptions have been set up in recent times, some confined to one country, others covering several. They are the fruit of Spiritan mission and they, in their turn, have become missionary.

The administration of the new circumscriptions is based upon guidelines coming from Chapters and Enlarged Councils, bearing in mind the needs and requests of local Churches (SRL 19). Some of the new Provinces are subdivided into regions: they are the product of the reflective analysis, prayers and decisions of the confreres and superiors, made in the context of present situations. Some of the older Districts have been incorporated into these circumscriptions, while retaining a degree of autonomy as regions or countries; they have their own superiors who are also members of the Provincial Council.

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Superior General's Report, Part III No. 3.1.1.1.

The unity of these new circumscriptions has a special evangelical witness: their international and intercultural character has a prophetic value, especially in places where there are divisions of an ethnic or nationalist nature. But, they also have to deal with other factors that present a special challenge: the variety of commitments, the great distances that are often involved, the particular interests that sometimes exist within the regional components of the circumscription. It is important to keep a balance between a Province and its constituent regions.

The new circumscriptions, especially in Africa, are showing a growth in the number of young people who are taking up the missionary challenge. This in turn has produced great needs for formation, both initial and on-going, above all in the areas of finance and formation personnel. The efforts being made towards financial self-sufficiency cannot presently meet the needs of these young circumscriptions in the areas of administration, formation, insurance and care of the elderly, buildings and investments. They can also appeal to the generosity of Christian communities and families for spiritual and material support in the training of their young members.

Faithful to the ideals of the Congregation, the new circumscriptions, wishing to continue the mission started by those who went before them, also wish to inculturate the Spiritan charism through their own missionary project. Among other elements this includes:

- ✧ a first evangelisation, which is not necessarily in a far off place, but is rather a journey towards peoples who have not heard the Gospel – a journey of trust and friendship, a discovery of the culture and religion of other people;
- ✧ a commitment to works for justice, peace and the integrity of creation: struggles of confreres alongside people for fair elections, for developing access to generic medicines and retroviral treatment for AIDS, for the creation of money-

saving networks, for peace initiatives where violence has prevailed, and for the care of refugees;

- ✧ the education of young people;
- ✧ ecumenism.

While remaining aware of the importance of a Spiritan missionary presence *ad intra*, the new circumscriptions remain open and will respond to the requests of the Congregation to send confreres on mission *ad extra*.

## GUIDELINES

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**4.1** The Congregation will continue to accompany the growth of new circumscriptions to guarantee the creation of a 'home base' (Directory for Organisation No. 50), 'witness communities'<sup>24</sup>, capable of witnessing to our spirituality and supporting our missions and formation programmes.

**4.2** Special attention will be paid to all the circumscriptions of Latin America, keeping in mind the fragility of these groups and the potential for the growth of the Congregation in this area.

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<sup>24</sup> A "witness community" is a community, a missionary project, which can take the form of a parish, a school, a farm or other means of generating funds with a view to financial self-sufficiency. This allows a circumscription: to put down roots and assure an effective and active presence in a particular area; to give living witness to the Spiritan charism within the local Church; to promote and discern Spiritan vocations; to have and maintain a support (spiritual and material) to help it gain a degree of autonomy for mission *ad intra* and *ad extra*; to have structures for welcoming its missionaries; to undertake the spread of missionary awareness in the local Church and to help it carry out its missionary vocation (cf. Conclusions from the Pan-African Conference of Spiritan Major Superiors and Formators, Ngoya, Cameroon, September 1-8, 2002; No. 2.1).

**4.3** Some international groups established for important missionary initiatives of the Congregation are still fragile, particularly with regard to personnel and finance. The General Council will give special attention to these groups and appoint suitable people to them.

**4.4** The superior of the circumscription and his council will promote and safeguard unity in diversity, encourage a feeling of belonging, insist on the quality of Spiritan community and personal life, encourage communication, solidarity and simplicity.

**4.5** All efforts will be made to promote unity in the ‘regionalised’ Provinces.

**4.6** We encourage a family atmosphere in our houses of formation and apostolic communities that are becoming increasingly international and intercultural.

**4.7** The houses of formation of new circumscriptions are often part of a consortium. In these houses the formators will provide the young confreres with the elements of Spiritan formation. They will take special care to make the link between intellectual reflection and the apostolic life in order to help the students to interpret what they see and hear.<sup>25</sup>

**4.8** Common houses of formation will be retained.

**4.9** “Apostolic life is at the heart of our Spiritan vocation” (SRL 3); therefore a balance will be sought between religious life and professional or priestly formation.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Guide for Formation II B.

**4.10** New circumscriptions will continue to seek self-sufficiency. Where possible, the General Council will support local investments with a view to auto-financing.

**4.11** Where it has not already been done, a new circumscription will move towards the signing of a contract with the local Ordinary.<sup>26</sup>

**4.12** New circumscriptions will be attentive to the importance of lay associates and will support their development.

**4.13** Collaboration and co-operation between new circumscriptions will be encouraged.

**4.14** The Chapter asks the General Council to clarify and standardise the use of the term 'region' throughout the Congregation. They will find another term for a grouping of several circumscriptions in a particular geographical area.

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<sup>26</sup> SRL 19 and 20 (cf. Can 675.3, 678.1, 678.2, 681.1).

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## 5. JOYS AND CHALLENGES OF OLDER CIRCUMSCRIPTIONS

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*“No need to remember past events,  
no need to think about what was done before.  
Look, I am doing something new, now it emerges;  
Can you not see it?” (Isaiah 43: 18-19)*

**M**ost of the older circumscriptions have a long history. They have not stopped sending confreres to carry out evangelisation in the South and in their own countries. But the situation has changed: few young men are now joining them and their own countries have become areas of mission.<sup>27</sup> In such a context, how can they answer the many calls that are made upon them? The capitulants tried to analyse this new situation and draw up some guidelines.

### 5.1 THE CONTEXT

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The world of North America, Australia and Europe is a world on the move, giving us many opportunities to meet with our fellow travellers. Christians in these areas are passing from a Christianity inherited from others to a deliberate and personal commitment. They are fewer in number but perhaps more deeply rooted. The Catholic Church itself is moving from

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. The Superior General's Report 4.1.

uniformity to diversity; the powerful mixture of long established parishioners and recently arrived immigrants is giving new life to many urban parishes.

Through our presence with migrants and refugees, we come close to the oppressed and disadvantaged. Our schools welcome them, our outreach makes them feel at home, our advice and training eases the pain of their transition. The presence of people of other faiths invites us to inter-faith dialogue in increasingly pluralistic and, at times, polarised societies.

Ours is a culture that values democracy, freedom of speech and religion, and the dignity and rights of individuals. Our presence in such a culture is a small voice calling for genuine human equality. We speak with and on behalf of the victims of gender and racial inequality, overlooked in a prevailing atmosphere of individualism, materialism and rampant consumerism.

We reach many people – especially young adults – through the internet and on our websites as we try to exploit the potential of technology to promote the Gospel.

The position of the Church has become more fragile; an example of this can be seen in the lowering of esteem in which priests are held. But this fragility does not mean giving in to despair. It will lead us to inculturate our Spiritan charism in response to what the Spirit is asking of us today. We seem to be poor but we enrich many people. Christianity has lost its former place of honour but we can still go to the people, be with them, live with them, walk beside them, listen to them and share our faith with them.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Maynooth 2.2.



There seem to be more struggles than joys as we go through this time of drought, but, like Elijah, we put our hope in the rain-bearing cloud, 'small as a human hand' (I Kings 18).

## 5.2 THE JOYS

*When we look at the new situation in which the older Provinces find themselves today, we can still find many reasons for rejoicing:*

In the past, the older circumscriptions made a great contribution to evangelisation, particularly in Africa and South America. Today, the confreres continue to give heroic witness on behalf of the poor and those without a voice. They have a deep sense of a job well done, a job that continues still. By their work, they have attracted young people of the South to the missionary vocation; it is a great joy for them to see these confreres collaborating in the mission of the oldest circumscriptions.

Another cause for rejoicing is the co-operation between these older circumscriptions, with the laity and with other parts of the Congregation. They are still receiving and training some new members who eventually go on mission; they also offer formation to other candidates coming from Africa, Latin America and Asia.

Another encouraging development is the creation of the centre for conflict resolution at Duquesne University. The university's resources for the advancement of Spiritan mission are many and rich in content. We are also looking forward to the proposed development of the two centres for "*Spiritan Catholic and Social Thought*" and "*Spiritan Spirituality*".

## 5.3 THE CHALLENGES

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*The older circumscriptions in North America, Australia and Europe are today having to redefine their mission in a new context. In doing this, they are coming up against a number of challenges.*

They are faced with the ageing of their members and a significant decline in the number of candidates joining the Congregation. Thus one of their major concerns “*is to provide a place of welcome for the sick and aged confreres, to care for them in an appropriate manner and to set up adequate facilities for their accommodation and health.*”<sup>29</sup>

These circumscriptions want to respond to the missionary needs of a society that is both secularised and post-Christian and to present an understanding of our faith which answers the needs of contemporary society. They are particularly concerned to reach out to young people and attract them to an interest in missionary work.

Communications occupy an ever-more important place in contemporary life. It is an area where language and technical progress are evolving with great speed. The older circumscriptions must not stand apart from these developments but learn to use these modern means of communication as effectively as possible, so as to let people know who they are and what it is that inspires them.

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Superior General's Report 2.5.1.

## 5.4 GUIDELINES

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*“We are no longer in the old order of things...  
If we try to stick to the habits and spirit of former  
times, our efforts will come to nothing...So let us  
embrace the new order with honesty and simplicity  
and bring to it the spirit of the Gospel.”*

(Libermann, ND X, 151)

There *is* a future for the older Provinces. The situation of poverty in which they find themselves is not synonymous with death; they will think rather in terms of a re-foundation of the Spiritan presence in the light of the new context.

**5.4.1** They believe that a new life is always possible for those who are open to the Holy Spirit. So it is not a question of limiting his action but of finding out what new things he requires of them. This is why the older circumscriptions try to collaborate in shared missionary projects which answer the needs of the society and Church of our day and which are in conformity with the charism of our founders.

**5.4.2** To accomplish this, they rely on the solidarity of the Spiritan family, both professed and lay. For their part, they will continue, as far as they can, to give their own support to the rest of the Congregation.

**5.4.3** The shared missionary projects of these circumscriptions will be confided preferably to international communities. Therefore, it is essential that confreres coming from elsewhere should enter wholeheartedly into these missionary projects of the circumscription in a spirit of co-responsibility.

**5.4.4** Confreres in retirement, despite their handicaps, have a great deal to offer with their past achievements and their missionary commitment. While growing old with dignity, they are still on mission by the support of their prayers, their commitment to justice, peace and the protection of creation, and, where possible, by the ministry they are still able to undertake.

**5.4.5** To continue their contribution to mission, the older circumscriptions will take steps to evolve their juridical status according to their particular situation. For this, they can make use of SRL 160.3<sup>30</sup> and the 'Directory for Organisation of the Congregation' no. 68.

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<sup>30</sup> According to the new numbering of SRL resulting from this General Chapter (cf. document no. 8. "The Rule of Life" in this booklet).

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## 6. FORMATION

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**O**ur Congregation is fortunate in having young people who wish to share in our mission. Their request to enter the Congregation implies their readiness to prepare for this by following an appropriate formation programme and to renew themselves continually throughout their lives. The world in which we live is changing ever more rapidly and so is calling us to new types of mission and witness (Maynooth 2).

The original agenda for the General Chapter did not foresee an in-depth reflection on formation in the Congregation. But the papers given on the transmission of the Spiritan charism<sup>31</sup>, the vocation of Brothers in the Congregation<sup>32</sup> and the situation of the new circumscriptions convinced the capitulants of the importance of having a common approach to formation. The value of our missionary commitment depends to a large extent on the nature and quality of the formation that we offer to those who wish to join us.<sup>33</sup>

### GUIDELINES

#### **The Spirit Behind our Formation**

*Our training programmes will adopt more of an apprentice style, giving students opportunities to have personal*

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<sup>31</sup> By Frs Peter Laast and Raymond Jung.

<sup>32</sup> By Brother Joseph Mba.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. also document 2 "Life in International communities" (2.12-2.16).

*experience of missionary life today (Maynooth 2.25). The process will be one of learning through experience and reflecting on that experience in the light of faith. All the stages of formation will have this apostolic dimension. A good formation also depends, to a considerable extent, on the quality of the community life that is offered.*

**6.1** Holiness of life and a spirit of sacrifice in the service of mission are paramount for Spiritan formation. Special attention will be given to the spirituality of our founders.

**6.2** An ethos of freedom with responsibility is fundamental to all areas of formation.

**6.3** A special emphasis will be given to transparency and responsibility in all aspects of life in formation.

**6.4** Attention will be given to training in human relationships and an appropriate development of the affective life at all stages of formation.

**6.5** Where formation communities are large, those in charge will organise life in such a way that the students can also have experience of community life in smaller groups.

**6.6** It is important that those in formation have the experience of insertion into situations of poverty; this will help in the process of discerning genuine vocations and will also be an aid to conversion. They will likewise be involved in issues of social justice so that they can acquire the tools for social analysis and strengthen their bonds of solidarity with the poor.

**6.7** Candidates in formation will be trained in collaborative ministry with the laity as part of the discerning process and with a view to learning important skills for future ministry.

**6.8** An appropriate system of assessment of candidates at each stage of formation is necessary. Drawing up accurate reports and assuring the necessary follow-up of students are essential to the process of discernment.

**6.9** In the light of the trend of living mission in international communities and of the increasing diversity of our commitments, our formation programmes will be adapted to this style of mission and community living.

### **The Stages of Formation**

*The capitulants examined the different steps of the formation process in order to clarify certain points. They drew particularly on some of the proposals suggested by the meeting of formators at Chevilly-Larue in July, 2002.*

### **6.10 Criteria for discerning and accepting candidates into the Congregation**

- ✧ Since we are a missionary Congregation, candidates must be willing and available to live mission in transcultural and international communities, in the spirit of *Ad Gentes* of the Second Vatican Council. The validity of mission in one's own country is also recognised.
- ✧ It is understood that the Spiritan vocation is essentially a vocation to the religious missionary life. Although many Spiritans are also called to the ministerial priesthood, a vocation to the latter is not in itself evidence of a Spiritan vocation.
- ✧ A personal spiritual life is an essential element of the Spiritan vocation.
- ✧ *"We have been called in Christ to live out our Spiritan calling in community...Community life is then an essential element in the Spiritan way of life"* (SRL 27-28).

- ✧ Candidates will show an inclination towards working with the poor and under-privileged.
- ✧ Spiritan ministry calls for a spirit of sacrifice and the ability to bear with difficulties.
- ✧ Good health is a normal requirement.
- ✧ Recognised forms of psychological testing of candidates will be used if available.

**6.11 First cycle formation** normally takes place in the circumscription of origin of the candidate. At this stage, special attention is given to human development, living in community and faith building.

**6.12 Spiritan novitiates** will have a common formation programme. The General Council will ensure that directors of novices are provided with the resources in Spiritan spirituality and history that are needed to give a suitable formation to the novices entrusted to them. As novitiates are becoming increasingly regional, it is preferable if the novices have reached the same stage of formation when they enter the novitiate.

**6.13 'Stage'**<sup>34</sup> is an essential element in the Spiritan formation process. It should normally be for two years in a transcultural mission situation among the poor and be appropriately accompanied.<sup>35</sup> Young confreres will be suitably prepared for this experience and will be subsequently guided in their reflection upon it. Time will be set aside for language-learning during this period.

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<sup>34</sup> Also referred to as OTP, PEP, Prefecting - according to different circumscriptions.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. SRL 136.1; GSF 70, 72.



**6.14 Second cycle formation.** *The report of the Superior General drew the attention of the capitulants to the 'great disparity' which exists between the various houses of formation in the Congregation, especially regarding the number of formators and the finances available.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the search for a better organisation of our second cycle formation is a matter of some urgency.*

Having identified the needs of second cycles throughout the Congregation, the General Council will undertake a feasibility study regarding the centralisation of second cycle formation. This study will take into account the following points:

- ✧ There will be no unnecessary duplication of formation structures.
- ✧ While academic excellence is an essential part of our formation, the intellectual content will not be over-stressed to the detriment of the human, spiritual, and pastoral dimensions. The integral development of the whole person will characterise our formation process.
- ✧ Collaboration with other religious missionary institutes in theological consortia will be continued. We will try to ensure that such institutes include missiology, anthropology and dialogue with other religions in their curricula. Where this is not possible, programs of missiology, anthropology, inter-religious dialogue, social analysis etc. will be organised in our own formation houses.
- ✧ Our houses of formation will be of a size that facilitates community life.
- ✧ Suitable spiritual accompaniment will be provided.

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Superior General's Report 3.2.2.3.

- ✧ There will be a good ratio of formators to students; the former will be well prepared and capable of passing on the Spiritan charism (cf. SRL 105).
- ✧ Wherever possible, these communities will be inserted among the poor and they will adopt a lifestyle that is simple. Students will take on some responsibility for the running of the life of the community.
- ✧ Emphasis will be placed on the international composition of these formation communities, both as regards students and formators.
- ✧ Questions of financing and resources will be carefully studied and responsibilities clearly defined. The role and duties of the General Council in this process will also be precisely delineated.

**6.15 On-going formation.** Programmes of on-going formation regarding the Spiritan charism and other areas linked to our mission will be set up in every large geographical region of the Congregation.<sup>37</sup>

### **Brothers**

*In his paper delivered to the Chapter, Brother Joseph Mba, of the Province of Nigeria, underlined the need to give a fresh impetus to the Brother's vocation. Having played such an important role in the history of the Congregation, the vocation of Brother, "this branch of the same tree", must not be allowed to perish. It is more indispensable than ever to the dynamism of our Institute. For their part, the capitulants reaffirmed that, as Spiritans, we are all called to the religious and missionary life; therefore, there should never again be any hint of discrimination amongst us. The clericalism that still exists in some of our communities must be eliminated.*

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. SRL 142-145, GSF III nos. 123-129.

*To encourage a greater number of young men to commit themselves in the Congregation as Brothers, the capitulants voted the following guidelines.*

**6.16** The vocation of Brother will be explained and recommended to young people who are interested in Spiritan life and to those who are already in formation, especially by using the following means:

- ✧ making known the missionary needs that require professional skills which brothers can offer (education, health, development, social communications, management, building, catechesis, theology, inter-religious encounters, etc.) and giving publicity to the apostolic projects undertaken in circumscriptions that have integrated this type of vocation into their work.
- ✧ giving a place in formation teams, as far as possible, to Brothers who have the required skills.
- ✧ giving young people who are attracted to this kind of Spiritan life the possibility of acquiring a recognised professional qualification.
- ✧ avoiding any form of words which gives a false image of the Congregation, such as 'Holy Ghost Fathers', or 'seminaries' when referring to our houses of formation.

### **Formators**

*By their witness, their fidelity to our evangelical commitments and their lifestyle amongst the poor, all Spiritans contribute to the formation process. But we also recognise the special role of those confreres who accept the responsibility of formation. The changing forms of mission demand a different type of formation and a new way of being formator.*

**6.17** Prior to taking on responsibility in formation, it is desirable that a confrere should have had a fairly lengthy experience of transcultural mission among the poor, if possible, working in an international group. He will be given adequate time to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge in the areas of formation, spiritual accompaniment, spirituality and Spiritan history. The personal lifestyle and integrity of the formator is a witness to those in formation.

**6.18** There will be an international meeting of formators every eight years.

### **Lay Associates**

*For many years now, Lay Associates have been sharing in the spirituality and missionary commitment of the Congregation. Three of their members were invited to the General Chapter. They spoke of their readiness and their joy in working with the confreres. They also talked of the need to find their sources of renewal in Spiritan spirituality. In this context, the preparation for their commitment is of great importance, as was brought out in the report of the Superior General.<sup>38</sup>*

**6.19** There is a need to harmonise the formation of Lay Associates in the Congregation, taking into account the needs of the different regions. The General Council will ensure that the necessary resources in Spiritan spirituality and history are available for this purpose.

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<sup>38</sup> Superior General's Report 3.2.4.4.

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## 7. FINANCE

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*Everything we possess as a Congregation is given to us for the work of mission and we have a duty to use it wisely. Our lifestyle as religious helps us to appreciate all the more the value of all we have. Our benefactors help us with their generous support and we can also count on the internal solidarity of the Congregation. The latter, as illustrated by the recent Jubilee Fund, is both inventive and generous.*

*But despite this, the economic situation facing the Congregation at present is such that it is increasingly difficult to sustain some of the structures that we have set up in the past and some of the new circumscriptions are finding it hard to survive. According to the Financial Report presented to the Chapter by the General Bursar, the requests made to the Cor Unum Fund have practically doubled between 1998 and 2003, while the degree to which we have been able to meet them has fallen from 49% to 33%. Moreover, the last six budgetary years of the General Administration have run at a deficit. The needs have continued to grow but the resources have not kept pace with them. At the same time, we would like to attain a greater equality amongst ourselves, a better balance between circumscriptions and to progress from a system of financial dependence to one of co-responsibility and participation in the management of our resources.*

*The General Chapter adopted and gave precision to several of the suggestions proposed by the Report of the General Bursar, with a view to redressing and improving the financial situation of the Congregation.*

## GUIDELINES

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**7.1** The General Chapter gives a mandate to the General Council to seek the opinion of qualified financial analysts and experts in financial matters in order to get the best advice on how we should use our resources or restructure our financial activities. The precise objectives of such a study would be to find ways to reduce dependency and to achieve a greater responsibility and self-sufficiency for the circumscriptions of the South. We would also seek guidance on improving our income and economic performance in general.

**7.2** If the conclusions of the proposed study recommend a new financial organisation for the Congregation, the General Council will adopt it after dialogue with the superiors of circumscriptions.

**7.3** In the context of our economically decentralised Congregation, the General Council will invite the circumscriptions to make known their moveable and immovable goods. They will indicate the degree to which their possessions are in proportion to their needs.

If circumscriptions conclude that their possessions exceed their needs, they are invited to place the surplus at the disposal of the General Council.

The General Council will put the funds thus collected at the disposition of circumscriptions which do not have sufficient reserves.

**7.4** The training of bursars for the new circumscriptions will be taken more seriously. A suitably qualified person will be appointed to visit the circumscriptions and give the necessary courses. New bursars can also follow the sessions which are

available each year in Rome for those taking on this responsibility.

**7.5** A more faithful adherence to the Rule of Life in matters of finance is enjoined upon every one of us, as a witness to a poverty that is lived genuinely and which brings us closer to the people in whose service we are working. Amongst us there will be openness, honesty and transparency and a real willingness to share in all matters relating to finance (SRL 72).

**7.6** All circumscriptions must submit an annual statement of accounts to the Generalate (SRL 175.4). This report will include, as well as the requested figures, a general assessment of the financial situation and the degree to which the resources correspond to the needs of the circumscription.

**7.7** The General Council will encourage and facilitate membership of a health insurance scheme for the confreres of new circumscriptions.

**7.8** The General Council asks circumscriptions, if they are able, to double their personal contribution for the support of the General Administration. Others which find this too burdensome will continue as before, in consultation with the General Bursar. The age limit for paying personal contribution will remain at 70.

**7.9** The General Council will be consulted about important property transactions and will give its advice in writing. (SRL 232.6). The General Council will also be consulted regarding the use of the money realised by the sale of such property.

**7.10** The division of the subsidies from Cor Unum as proposed at Maynooth will be retained: 70% for ordinary

formation, 20% for formation buildings and 10% for extraordinary grants.<sup>39</sup>

**7.11** Provinces which have no candidates in formation yet still have a formation account are encouraged to offer the revenue from such an account to help support formation in new circumscriptions.

**7.12** New circumscriptions will set up financial advisory committees, composed not only of Spiritans but also of competent and qualified lay people, to advise them on all matters pertaining to finance and investment.<sup>40</sup>

**7.13** The General Chapter asks the General Council to strengthen the fund-raising efforts of *Sharelink*, by providing it with the necessary means, both in the United States and in other countries.

**7.14** Our missionary solidarity always includes financial solidarity.

**7.14.1** However, Spiritans will never commit themselves to a pastoral ministry simply to receive financial remuneration. Ministry in another circumscription, which will always be preceded by an appointment (SRL 159), can be accepted in so far as the work is in accordance with the Spiritan charism, compatible with the missionary project of the receiving circumscription and after consultation with the local superior and the local Church. In this whole area, transparency and honesty are required of every confrere, no matter where he is engaged.

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<sup>39</sup> Maynooth 6.11.

<sup>40</sup> Maynooth 6.18.



**7.14.2** A confrere coming to fulfil a ministry in a circumscription in a permanent manner will be appointed to that circumscription in conformity with SRL 159.

If he receives remuneration for his work, it is added to the funds of the community, which itself practices sharing in the circumscription (SRL 70.1).

Thanks to this income and others, this circumscription makes a regular contribution to the solidarity of the Congregation, particularly through *Cor Unum*.

When the need arises, and in the spirit of SRL 159.3, a confrere who is appointed in this way can, with the agreement of the superiors of the two circumscriptions, start initiatives for raising funds which will be sent back to his circumscription of origin.

Also, the circumscription to which he is appointed can adopt other forms of financial help for the circumscription of origin of this confrere.

**7.15** Confreres from the new circumscriptions could approach the bishops of the dioceses where we have been the main agents of evangelisation to seek permission to collect funds.

**7.16** Spiritans will seek to draw up a written contract with the local bishop, guaranteeing a minimum income to ensure the existence of the group and its apostolate (SRL 19, 235.1, 235.2).



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## 8. SPIRITAN RULE OF LIFE

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**O**ur present Rule of Life, having been approved by the Holy See on the Feast of Pentecost, June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1987, was formally distributed to each confrere by the Superior General, Fr Pierre Haas, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September of the same year, the Feast of the Birth of the Blessed Virgin. It was the fruit of long research and patient discussion throughout our Congregation, starting from our General Chapter of 1968 which followed the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

Our General Chapter of 1992 at Itaici asked the new General Council to prepare a revision of Chapter VII of the Rule of Life, 'The Organisation of the Congregation', so as to take into account some recent and rapid changes, both as regards our understanding of 'mission' and the emergence of new forms of organisation in the Congregation. The Council replied to this request by producing a 'Directory for the Organisation of the Congregation', which would allow a more flexible response to the new questions that were arising from the changes in mission and in the Congregation. The Chapter at Maynooth in 1998, while recognising the soundness of this option and approving the 'Directory', nevertheless gave the General Council a two-fold task to accomplish:

- ✧ "to study the question of the frequency of General Chapters and its consequences for the mandates of the members of the General Council...and to present the results of its researches to the next General Chapter";

- ✧ “to set up a juridical commission to study the possibility and the manner of integrating the ‘Directory for Organisation’ into Chapter 7 of the Spiritan Rule of Life’. They would submit the result of this work to the next General Chapter.”<sup>41</sup>

*The former General Council conscientiously carried out this double request, basing itself particularly on the ‘wide support’ given by the Enlarged General Council at Pittsburgh (2001) “to a suggestion that the period between General Chapters be extended to eight or nine years”. The Superior General and his Council would have a mandate of the same length but non-renewable.*<sup>42</sup>

## 8.1 THE FREQUENCY OF GENERAL CHAPTERS

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*Amongst the reasons that led the Chapter to reduce the frequency of General Chapters with the consequent lengthening of the non-renewable mandates, there were the following:*

- ✧ *A longer mandate helps the Superior General and his Council to gain a more complete knowledge of the complex reality of the Congregation, gives more time for visitations, reflection, forward-planning – especially the implementation of the decisions of the General Chapter – and a better preparation of the Enlarged General Council.*
- ✧ *A non-renewable mandate helps to avoid falling into a routine and assists in the renewal of persons and ideas;*
- ✧ *In view of the increased number of large meetings of circumscriptions (‘regional meetings’) in recent years, and*

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<sup>41</sup> Maynooth 7.4 & 9.3.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. I/D 58, December 2001: The Enlarged General Council of Pittsburgh, p. 8.

*of confreres working in the same areas of activity, there seems to be less need for frequent General Chapters, as the practice of sharing together can be catered for by other means;*

- ✧ *In view of the worrying financial situation of the Congregation that we are experiencing at present, a reduction in the frequency of General Chapters and Enlarged General Councils will help us to reduce our expenses.*

*Naturally, the capitulants were also aware of the drawbacks in prolonging the intervals between General Chapters and the consequent lengthening of the mandates of the Superior General and his Assistants. No solution is perfect!*

*The length of other mandates (Superiors of circumscriptions, etc.) and the frequency of circumscription Chapters have not been altered. Experience, that indispensable source of true wisdom, will tell the next General Chapter in 2012 if we should also change the Rule of Life on these points.*

## **8.2 THE REASONS FOR OTHER CHANGES TO CHAPTER VII OF THE RULE OF LIFE**

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*The General Chapter decided not to make a complete revision of Chapter VII of the Rule of Life, believing that the 'Directory for the Organisation of the Congregation' is a sufficiently adapted and flexible instrument to deal with the problems which arise, and will continue to arise, concerning the organisation of the Congregation. However, it did make certain modifications to Chapter VII which were considered to be particularly important*

- 1) *Some changes concerning the circumscriptions: Henceforth, 'Groups' are explicitly recognised and listed*

*in the Rule of Life, alongside the other three types of circumscription already accepted – Provinces, Districts and Foundations (SRL 163). Therefore, the articles concerning the ‘Chapter of a Circumscription’ are broken down into ‘Chapters of Provinces and Foundations’ and ‘Chapters of Districts and Groups’ (SRL 177-182). The future of a Province experiencing serious difficulties is now addressed (SRL 160.3). Article 156.2 leaves the future open when it says that other types of circumscription (e.g., larger entities), in addition to those already in existence, can be created.*

- 2) *Some changes concerning the stability of appointments and commitments: Henceforth, the dialogue that precedes the decision of a first appointment will include the Major Superior of the receiving circumscription (SRL 158.1). Article 159.2 adds precision to the conditions in which an appointment made by the Superior General can be changed. The conditions to be fulfilled for a confrere to normally reside in a country where a Spiritan circumscription exists are regulated in article 184.1. Finally, it is reaffirmed that the approval of the Superior General, with the consent of his Council, is necessary for “any new commitment which is beyond the actual field of the apostolate of existing circumscriptions” (SRL 163.4).*

## 8.3 CHANGES TO THE RULE OF LIFE DECIDED BY THE GENERAL CHAPTER

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*The changes decided on by the General Chapter at Torre d'Aguilha (July 2004) are in bold print. They were approved by the "Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Apostolic Life Societies on 5 November 2004.*

### CHAPTER VII

## THE ORGANISATION OF THE CONGREGATION

### Circumscriptions

**156.** A circumscription is usually a grouping of communities brought together under the authority of a superior and council (Canon 621). Circumscriptions exist to allow the Congregation to be present and accomplish its apostolic task in one or more local Churches.

**156.1** The following are circumscriptions:

- Provinces;
- Foundations;
- Districts;
- **Groups;**
- groups with their own special status, created to meet a need.

**156.2** The Superior General, with the consent of his Council, can create new forms of circumscription *or a wider entity*, according to the needs of particular circumstances.

**156.3** For circumscriptions other than provinces and foundations, a confrere's "province of origin" will be decided by the Superior General with the consent of his Council.

**156.4** A member can change his "province of origin" with the consent of the major superiors concerned. Only the Superior

General with the consent of his Council has the competence to authorise such a change. (*This article is the former 160.3*).

**158.** The first appointment of confreres to particular circumscriptions is a right belonging to the Superior General, with the consent of his Council.

**158.1** This appointment is made in understanding with the confrere concerned, his major superior **and the major superior of the receiving circumscription.**

**159.** Appointment to a circumscription makes one a member of it.

**159.1** The Superior General, with the consent of his Council, can transfer a confrere from one circumscription to another for the good of the Congregation and of its apostolic task. Such an appointment is preceded by an understanding reached with the confrere, the major superiors concerned and the major superior of the confrere's circumscription "of origin".

**159.2** Once the Superior General, with the consent of his Council, appoints a confrere to a particular circumscription, including cases of first appointments, any request to withdraw him for another work within the first six years requires the prior consent of the Superior General and his Council.

**159.3** Every superior can – after consultation with his council – transfer a confrere from his circumscription to another one, with the agreement of the major superior of the latter, and following dialogue with the confrere himself. In cases where neither of the two circumscriptions is the confrere's province "of origin", the consent of the major superior of the province "of origin" is also required.

**159.4** In each instance of such transfer, the special ties between a confrere and his province "of origin" as well as the rights and duties that flow from these ties are kept in mind (**cf. 160.1**).

**159.5** Every transfer from one circumscription to another requires a written document.



**159.6** Copies of this document are to be sent, one to the General Administration, one to each major superior concerned and one to the confrere concerned.

### *Different types of circumscription*

#### **Provinces**

**160.** A province is a circumscription whose apostolic activities include, among others, the following tasks: missionary animation; the promotion of vocations; formation; welcoming and caring for those confreres who come home, temporarily or permanently.

**160.1** Each member is said to “belong” to a “province of origin”. **This province “of origin” is the circumscription** to which he was admitted by first profession.

**160.2** Save where other arrangements have been made, the province “of origin” has duties with regard to each member which it shall diligently discharge. These obligations include caring for sick confreres, whether their incapacity is temporary or long-lasting, for confreres who come home to retire and for other confreres who return home for whatever reason.

**160.3** When a Province can no longer fulfil the conditions set out in SRL 160, the Province can either become a Group, amalgamate with a neighbouring circumscription, or become part of a wider entity, following a decision of the Superior General with the consent of his Council. (cf. DO 68).

#### **Foundations**

**161.** A foundation is a circumscription specific to the Congregation, being placed under the direct responsibility of the Superior General and his Council. The reason for foundations is to facilitate the setting up of one or more provinces.

**161.1** Those who are admitted to profession by a foundation become members of it. The foundation is considered to be their “province of origin”.

**161.2** Foundations differ greatly from one another from their very beginnings. For this reason the Superior General and his Council, in constant fraternal contact with the confreres in charge locally of the foundations, modify the organisation of each one of them to fit the different stages of development until it becomes a province.

A “customary” compiled by all the parties concerned progressively defines a common type of organisation.

**161.3 Conditions for the birth of a new Foundation and for the transition from a Foundation to a Province are laid down in the “Directory for Organisation” (nos. 44-65).**

## Districts

**162.** A district is a circumscription which, because of the number of its members and the developed state of its apostolic activity, has attained a level of organisation that gives assurance of a certain stability.

**162.1** A district is erected, modified or suppressed depending upon the nature of the apostolic work, of the help being given to the local Church, and of the number of its personnel (**cf. DO 28**).

## Groups

**163.** A Group is a circumscription created to undertake a specific missionary task. It consists of confreres from one or many Provinces or Foundations, with a level of organisation that gives it a degree of stability (**DO31**).

**163.1** The Superior General, with the consent of his Council, **decides on the founding of new Groups** and determines the status, purpose and structure of these circumscriptions within the Congregation.

**163.2** Members of such circumscriptions have the same rights and duties as do members of other circumscriptions.

**163.3** When a new Group is to be established, the General Council must clarify the reasons for its existence and the

aims that have been set for it. It will organise the setting up of the necessary support in finance and personnel. Such a Group should preferably be international (DO 36-37).

**163.4** Any new commitment, beyond the actual field of the apostolate of an existing circumscription, needs the approval of the Superior General with the consent of his Council. It could be confided either to a community of Spiritans or to an international Group. Particular attention will be given to its links with the rest of the Congregation.

*The chapter of a circumscription*

## **Provincial and Foundation Chapters**

**177.** The **chapter of a province or a foundation** works out the goals and objectives of the **circumscription**. It lays down directions and gives guidelines for the circumscription and it applies the prescriptions and the directives of General Chapters, in function of local circumstances.

**178.** The **chapter of a province or a foundation** is composed of members by right and elected members. The number of elected members shall be at least equal to the number of members by right.

**178.1** Regarding the election of delegates to a chapter, all professed members have the right to vote. All those with perpetual vows can be elected.

**178.2** The **chapter of a province or a foundation** can take the form of a General Assembly with all the members being convoked. It then functions as a chapter.

**179.** The following are members by right: the **provincial or foundation superior** and the members of the council of the circumscription.

**180.** Delegated members are elected in part by the confreres **who are appointed to the province or foundation** and in part by

confreres who have been appointed to other circumscriptions but **who belong to the province or foundation “by origin”**.

**180.1** Delegates are chosen by a system of representation that is decided by the **provincial or foundation superior** with the consent of his council.

**180.2** Care is taken to assure an adequate representation of confreres appointed to other circumscriptions.

**181.** The chapter of a **province or foundation** shall meet at least every six years, convoked by the **circumscription superior**, with the consent of his council.

**181.1** In the space of these six years there may be a meeting of the **enlarged provincial or foundation council**. Its members have deliberative voice. The **circumscription** chapter shall decide the mode of representation at this enlarged council.

**181.2** Some representatives from the General Council and from neighbouring circumscriptions are invited to the **provincial or foundation** chapter.

## **Group and District Chapters**

**182.** The chapter of a **group or district** works out the goals and objectives of the **circumscription**. It lays down directions and gives guidelines for the circumscription and applies the prescriptions and directives of General Chapters in function of local circumstances.

**182.1** The chapter consists in principle of all the members of the circumscription. It has the ordinary deliberative powers of a chapter if in fact **two thirds of the membership is present**.

**182.2** For practical reasons, it may be organised on a basis of representation. The decision to do this is made by the superior of the **circumscription**, with the consent of his council.

**182.3** For the purpose of this representation, all the Spiritans who have been appointed to the **circumscription** are electors.

**182.4** The chapter of a group or district shall meet at least every six years, convoked by the **circumscription superior** with the consent of his council.

**182.5** In the space of these six years there may be a meeting of **the enlarged circumscription council**. Its members have deliberative vote. The chapter of a group or district shall decide the mode of representation at this enlarged council.

**182.6** The chapter of a group or district decides for itself how it shall function.

**182.7** Some representatives from the General Council, the **circumscriptions** of “origin” of the confreres, and neighbouring circumscriptions are invited to the chapter.

### *Relations between circumscriptions*

**184.** The members of a circumscription remain subject to the authority of their major superior, whether they live within the circumscription or elsewhere, until such time as a transfer shall have been effected.

**184.1** When a confrere goes to reside in a country where there is a **Spiritan circumscription**, for whatever reason, there will be a previous understanding between the superiors of the two circumscriptions concerned. This will include the reason for the stay, its length, pastoral engagements foreseen, community life and financial arrangements (**DO 74**).

**185.** Special bonds exist and are fostered between the circumscription where a confrere is working and his **circumscription “of origin”**.

**185.1** So as to make this close collaboration real, frequent meetings shall be held touching on matters of mutual interest **between the circumscriptions concerned**.

**185.2** In a spirit of solidarity and shared responsibility, each one shall be prepared, should the need arise, to come home to his **circumscription “of origin”**.

**185.3** Periodically, the General Council shall organise meetings of major superiors, in order to facilitate relations between circumscriptions.

## **The General Administration**

### *The Superior General*

**188.** He is elected for **eight** years.

**189.** He cannot be re-elected.

## **The General Chapter**

**213.** The ordinary General Chapter takes place every **eight** years. It is always an elective chapter.

**213.1** The extraordinary General Chapter is convoked by the Superior General with the consent of his Council either for exceptional reasons or at the request of two thirds of the major superiors.

**213.2** It is not elective except in the case where the Superior General resigns at the Chapter.

**215.** The General Chapter has the power of modifying, abrogating or giving an interpretation of the Spiritan Rule of Life by means of a two-thirds majority of votes.

Modification to the Constitutions or an authentic interpretation requires the approval of the Holy See.

**215.1** The General Chapter, will examine, approve, and where necessary modify, the “Directory for the Organisation of the Congregation” and other Directories of a similar nature. An absolute majority of the votes of delegates is required.

## **Appendix I**

### **The Election of the Superior General and of his Council**

- 239. The out-going Superior General cannot be re-elected.**
- 243. The mandate of the General Assistants is for eight years.**
- 244. They cannot be re-elected.**





**PART II**

**OTHER  
DOCUMENTS**



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## 9. ONE BIG FAMILY

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*T*oday, our Congregation is showing a great diversity, both as regards the origin of its members and its commitments and organisation. In answering new calls, she demonstrates her openness to the Spirit and her availability, running the risk of dispersion.

*This is a reality that we have to face up to. It assumes that we are all capable of appreciating the richness of the missionary experience of our confreres. It means that over and above our differences, we see ourselves as a part of 'one big family', as we are reminded by this extract from the Superior General's Report (4.2):*

“How well do we live together in this great and complex organisation which is the Congregation? It is not just somewhere where we carry out our duties on working days: it is the place where we have committed our whole life, to live as brothers and sisters in one big ‘rainbow’ family. We come from all the continents: 12 countries in Europe, 25 in Africa, 9 in the Americas and the Caribbean, 2 in Oceania and 2 in Asia. To this great diversity of origins, nationalities and cultures, we must also add that of age (our age ‘pyramid’ is fat at both ends!), education, qualifications and differing experiences throughout our lives.

Amongst Spiritans, you can find those who are super-active and others who are rather people of listening, of contact and dialogue, of contemplation. Some have been marked by the trials of life; perhaps they have made them more human, more

serene and open to others. Others carry the wounds of contradiction and incomprehension. Sometimes we can feel weighed down by the burden of our differences, of the complexity of the Congregation spread across the continents and fashioned by so many cultures, religions and visions of the world. Some believe that our Institute has become too complicated and that we go looking for difficulties.

But can we not perhaps see in this a reflection of the sending out of missionaries at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, the words of Jesus becoming a reality: *“You will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on you and then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem ...and to the earth’s remotest end”*? (Acts 1:8).

Being members of a world-wide organisation, we must live in this world, body and soul, each in his own way, not for ourselves but for the mission to which we have been called. Perhaps we have set out for life, even if it is far from our origins. It is a characteristic of the Spiritan family which has welcomed us that we forget ourselves so as to meet the people of the world, to share those things which we most treasure and to give all, even our lives: *“The Spirit calls us to a continual conversion, shapes our personal and community lives, makes us partakers in the death and resurrection mystery of Jesus and prepares us to make the total gift of ourselves for the Kingdom”* (SRL 10).

It was precisely to live such a vocation and to be faithful to such a commitment that we entered this religious family. The Congregation lives by the charism of our founders; they certainly set the bar very high but they have continued to inspire us for the last 300 years. Their spirit is passed on to us through our life together. Thanks to the spirituality they left us and the communion between ourselves in our work and prayer, we live a life which is quite extraordinary but which, without this help and support, would be completely beyond us. We are

given the strength of unity in a world which is perturbed by individualism, egoism and terrorism. This is the profound meaning of our religious family and our spiritual history – to make us, by these means, witnesses to the love of God.”



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## 10. LETTER TO OLDER CONFRERES

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**From the Members of the General Chapter**

Torre d'Aguilha, 16 July 2004

***TO ALL THE OLDER MEMBERS  
OF THE CONGREGATION***

Dear Confreres,

The 19<sup>th</sup> General Chapter, which took place near Lisbon from June 20<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> July, is drawing to a close and we are convinced that your daily prayers made a considerable contribution to our reflections and our work. It is an important moment in the life of our religious family; each of us is reminded of the call that Jesus has given us to take his message to the people of today. We serve the Church as a family, but each according to that particular call we have received from God according to our possibilities.

For many years, you stayed with those people to whom you were sent by the Congregation and we know that you gave yourselves heart and soul to this mission. And now your

younger brothers are continuing this work for the Gospel. The example of your life and your faith is an inspiration for us to be ever more faithful to our missionary vocation.

As this Chapter finishes, we want to thank you for this witness of your life. You continue to serve through your daily prayers and the offering of your dedicated lives. It gives us strength as we journey along the missionary paths and helps us to shoulder our responsibilities in the Congregation and in the Church.

As members of the same Spiritan family, we need each other and the end of a Chapter is an opportune time to repeat this. We remain in deep communion in our prayers and in the peace of Christ.

*The members of the General Chapter*



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## 11. LAY SPIRITANS

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Sharing our charism, including our spirituality and mission with lay people is a reality in the Spiritan world of today. Their presence and participation in Spiritan life is a richness and a gift we welcome with gratitude and hope.

As happened in the Chapters of Itaici and Maynooth, the General Chapter of Torre d'Aguilha had three lay associates present, two women and a man, coming from three different continents: Mary Ann Lam from the island of Mauritius, Joy Warner from Canada and Jean-Pierre Roesch from France. The sharing of our spirituality with lay people, as well as new forms of communion and co-responsibility in mission, are already part of the Congregation's heritage.

The energy of the Spiritan Year, in all its different forms, brought many lay people in contact with the ideals of our founders, with mission lived as a pilgrimage of meeting the people and challenges of today's world. They also felt stimulated by the appeal made to be "faithful to the gift you have received".

### 11.1 WHAT ATTRACTS LAY PEOPLE TO THE SPIRITAN FAMILY?

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In the time that the Chapter gave to listening to the significant experiences in the life of the Congregation today, we heard from our lay associates, our brothers and sisters. On hearing

the reports of what is happening to them in their relationship with the Congregation, we understand better why one of the major challenges of religious life today is the sharing of mission with the laity. Truly “a new chapter, full of hope, is opened in the story of the relationship between religious and laity”.<sup>43</sup>

The personal story of each lay Spiritan shows us that there are three essential elements in their desire to drink from the richness of our charism: spiritual experience, specific mission and life in community. In general, the decisive factors are basic contact with one or more confreres or a community, knowledge of the evangelising impact of some of our older missionaries, direct contact with our founders and sources. We listened to these lay people spontaneously telling us how their spiritual life, lived according to their own lay vocation, is marked by the importance given to prayer, the action of the Spirit in daily life, ‘practical union’ with God, an attitude of availability, and the confident waiting for the ‘moment of God’.

We heard the lay people tell us in Torre d’Aguilha how this pledge to develop a spiritual life with a strong missionary dimension “*changes an awful lot of preconceptions, gradually changes the way of living with others and sees differences in a positive manner.*”<sup>44</sup>

There is a huge amount of missionary projects in our circumscriptions that count on their commitment. Emigrants and refugees, drug addicts, ethnic minorities, ecumenical actions, voluntary missionaries *Ad Gentes*, initiatives in bringing about respect for cultural diversity, action and campaigns to awaken the missionary spirit in communities...

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<sup>43</sup> *Vita Consecrata* 54.

<sup>44</sup> The text in Italics is taken from reports given by lay people at the General Chapter.

are examples of how *“the laity bring to the Spiritan community, an energy which comes from their presence in and understanding of the world”*. Lay people are convinced that *“Spiritan spirituality thrives in service”*.

### **11.2 “SPIRITAN LAITY ARE A BRANCH OF THE SPIRITAN TREE”<sup>45</sup>**

A real ecclesiology of communion and participation is created by an attitude of shared responsibility in the task of building up the Kingdom of God.

Therefore in Torre d’Aguilha we welcome not only the sharing and the appeals of the laity, but also the conviction with which they affirm that *“Spiritan laity are a branch of the Spiritan tree”*. In the favourable atmosphere of the Chapter the laity shared their expectations: *“If lay Spiritans form part of the Congregation in a manner that is appropriate to them, they should be able to count on its solicitude, especially from superiors, both provincial and local”*.

The journey so far leads us to realise that among the lay people who relate to the Congregation, there are different levels of belonging to the ‘Spiritan Family’. Depending on their spiritual closeness and their missionary commitment, we can identify:

- ✧ the friends of Spiritans who are collaborators in our mission in various ways;
- ✧ lay people who feel attracted by the spirituality of our founders and by our mission and belong to prayer and reflection groups; concretely, the members of Spiritan fraternities and Spiritan missionary groups;

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<sup>45</sup> Heading from a report presented by lay people at the Chapter.

- ✧ ‘lay associates’ who desire a deeper commitment with the Congregation and who, after a time and a course of specific formation, sign a written contract of association.

In certain contexts, the laity prefer to be called ‘Lay Spiritans’ in general, while reserving the title of ‘Lay Associates’ for those who sign a formal contract with the circumscription which welcomes them.

### 11.3 WELCOMING NEW ENERGY

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The guidelines coming from Maynooth<sup>46</sup> regarding the sharing and participation of laity in the life and mission of the Congregation brought significant progress: the creation of appropriate structures according to the needs of each group; the implementation of different forms of belonging to the Spiritan family and relating to Spiritan communities; the appointment of a professed Spiritan to accompany each group, etc.

An assessment of the present situation was given in a study published by the General Council in March 2000.<sup>47</sup> The laity in contact with us and attracted by our charism adhere to and commit themselves to the Congregation according to the concrete proposals made to them, even demanding ones, in relation to spiritual growth and commitment to mission. It was the lay people who said to the Chapter, “*we are not at the end of the journey of reflection regarding our identity and our place in the heart of the Congregation*”. We believe that we need to be open to the manifestation of the Spirit and the specifics of each group.

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<sup>46</sup> Maynooth General Chapter 1998, nos. 4.20-23; 5.5-8.

<sup>47</sup> I/D 57 March 2000.

We also need to be attentive to unity and identity, which can be guaranteed by the following elements:

- ✧ **A common soul.** The identity of the laity centres round four fundamental aspects: vocation, Spiritan mission, the spirituality of our founders and a sense of belonging to the Spiritan family. Lay Spiritans see themselves in a kind of common soul: a certain life of prayer and community, taking into account private life and approaches to be defined in each case, and some kind of commitment to the defence of the weak and the poor (questions of justice and peace). Aware that diversity is richness and taking into account the make-up of each group, some are asking if the time has not come to make a common directory for 'Lay Associates'.<sup>48</sup>
- ✧ **Formation.** The future of lay Spiritans greatly depends on formation, the deepening of the Christian vocation, a solid knowledge of the spirituality of our founders and the demands of mission. It is desirable that each circumscription and/or region has its formation programme for 'Lay Spiritans'.<sup>49</sup>

Welcoming the laity in the communities, commitment within the missionary projects of the circumscription and mission *ad extra* are three areas that merit particular attention in the next eight years.

We believe that the participation of laity in the life of the Congregation can bring an unexpected and rich deepening of some aspects of our charism, leading to a more spiritual interpretation of it and drawing from it a new apostolic energy.

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<sup>48</sup> Superior General's Report 3.2.4.4.

<sup>49</sup> Document "Formation", Torre d'Aguilha, 6.19.



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## 12. RELATIONS WITH ISLAM

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**A paper delivered to the General Chapter  
by Fr René You**

**D**uring the summer of 2002, delegates of confreres who are working in countries where there is a majority of Muslims met together at Banjul in The Gambia.

Since then, many events – most of them unfortunately marked by violence – have confirmed the place of Islam in our world and in contemporary history. Let me just call to mind, in no particular order and without being exhaustive, the countries affected by conflicts in which Muslims have played a role in one way or another: Afghanistan, Chechnya, Iraq, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, the Balkans, Yemen, Indonesia, Thailand, Pakistan, India, the Philippines, Sudan, Nigeria, North Africa...

The Muslim component, especially in its Islamist version, of the movement of migrants threatens to destabilise many European and African countries, or at least to bring them new social, political and religious problems. Just think of the impact of the traumatic terrorist attacks attributed to Islamist groups in the USA, Spain and other countries – including Saudi Arabia.

In all this turmoil, it is evident that the Muslim world appears wounded, humiliated and suffering from deep resentment; after the splendour of an era when Islam generated great cultures, thought to be for all time because blessed by God, the

Muslim world has been turned upside down by historical events that have left it by the roadside, where Muslims feel marginalised and incapable of being fully modernised – or rather, incapable of reconciling the religious with the modern. The Muslim peoples, most of whom are silent and peaceful and sometimes taken hostage by a minority of *desperados*, are hoping for better days and are open to dialogue on the world scene.

How can we, whether individually or as a Congregation, ignore a problem of such magnitude that it takes up 75% of the international news on TV? As adepts of justice and peace, how can we refuse either to agree or disagree with military, political and social solutions put forward to solve problems faced by men and women and the young in the countries to which we have been sent?

But, would that be enough? Let us remember this: the profound insight of Libermann's first team was – over and above the educational, social and family care brought to recently freed slaves and to the people of Africa in general – to offer the liberating message of salvation, to meet up with human beings in their relationship to their God and to their brothers and sisters. It seems to me this is also our task with regard to the suffering Muslim world. It is up to us to go out to meet them and, if possible, to stand side by side with them, in an attitude of respect and friendship, in all aspects of their family, social, cultural and, especially, religious life. In the name of our faith, it is up to us as Christians to be interested in this fundamental aspect of religion. If we, as Christians and missionaries, who are in daily contact with Muslims, do not do this, then who will?

As Spiritans, we cannot run away from this task. I think one of the major missionary challenges at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to go out to meet those of other religions, particularly Muslims. We know what the task is: to get together, to



dialogue and to appeal for collaboration while respecting our differences. All this is with the aim of creating a world where the spiritual dimension of humanity is not left out. The work has only just started and the workers to do it are few in number.

Experience has taught us, we who have invested a good part of our missionary life to this task, that a long period of specific and often arduous formation is needed. We have to accept from the outset that we will not be able to foresee the fruits of our action. We have to have a long-term view; it takes much time to win over people who have often been tricked or wounded by our fellow countrymen and women, and even by our fellow Christians. As far as possible, we have to work to earn our living, or at least not to depend on external help; otherwise, we will be seen as proselytisers trying to win souls through material assistance from abroad. It is also essential to build up a solid spiritual life – the task of a life time – and to be convinced that the Holy Spirit is the protagonist of all mission.

**Concretely, I would like to propose four subjects for the reflection of the capitulants:**

- 1. Given the importance of Islam in the modern world, how can we offer to members of the Congregation, even if they are not directly involved in this type of work, a true understanding of Islam, capable of ridding them of a certain number of *a priori* misconceptions and prejudices which are harmful to dialogue between Christians and Muslims?**
- 2. How can we insert a study of Islam into the programme of studies in our formation houses? I would suggest three points as part of this study:**
  - ✧ the history of Islam;
  - ✧ the theology of Islam;

- ❖ **Muslim-Christian dialogue and a study of what has already been done by Muslims themselves, especially in the last few years, in their efforts to reconcile Islam and Modernity.**
- 3. What can we offer young confreres who are called to involvement in Muslim-Christian dialogue (through their pastoral training programme in a predominantly Muslim country; through studies done in a Muslim country or in a setting favourable to facing up to the questions posed by Islam to Christian theology; through more systematic Arabic or Islamic studies...)?**
- 4. What is the role of the co-ordinator for relations with Islam?**

In conclusion, no one can deny the fact that Islam has an important place on the world scene, so I dare to hope that the Chapter will be able to devote some time to reflecting upon it. But even if we have not been understood, (by 'we' I mean those of us who work in predominantly Muslim countries), we will always be able to console ourselves, as we are wont to do in this particular ministry, by reading no. 15.3 of SRL: "*In certain circumstances it is impossible for us to proclaim the Good News by word. In such cases, our motivation is the conviction that the Holy Spirit is already present and that our presence is witness and service in the name of the gospel for the Kingdom (Ad Gentes 6)*".

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## 13. “*FAITHFUL TO THE GIFT ENTRUSTED TO US*”

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### Retreat for the General Chapter by Fr Adélio Torres Neiva

**T**he principal work document of the Chapter had as its title ‘*Authentically Living the Spiritan Charism Today*’. The Superior General in his report tells us that “there is an urgency that the Chapter reflects on the truth of our apostolic life and more precisely on our life of fraternity, at all its levels, with a strong insistence on community life.” Therefore, the retreat will try to help the capitulants reflect on the following themes; “*The richness of our apostolic life*”, “*mission as gift or the mystique of mission*”, “*community, a gift for mission*”, and “*some challenges for the Congregation today*”. The following is a very brief summary of these themes.

### 13.1 THE RICHNESS OF OUR RELIGIOUS LIFE

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#### 13.1.1 The Theological Meaning of the Post-conciliar Evolution of Religious Life

*Perfectae Caritatis* saw the renewal of religious life in the line of *Lumen Gentium* (LG), that is, a renewal from its interior mystery. The truth, however, is that in the first post-conciliar period, the evolution was made primarily along the lines of *Gaudium et Spes*, that is, from its

apostolic activity. This called religious to the frontiers of the world. From this grew new values and a new understanding of religious life.

But this understanding of the apostolic dimension of consecrated life brings an inevitable risk: the risk of changing the activities and the structures without renewing the people and the communities. Today, one has the impression that consecrated life is losing its prophetic fire, that it has become too active and less charismatic, without time for God. Fr Tillard says that we are paying the price of being givers without first being adorers. We need to recover the mystique of mission, the primacy of God in evangelisation, the contemplative dimension of apostolic life.

### **13.1.2 The Source of Apostolic Life**

Both *Ad Gentes* (AG) and LG bring the origin of mission to its true source: mission having its origin in the Trinity of God. It is the heart of the Father, being infinite love, wishing to send His Love to all, that is the origin of mission. It is this font of love of the Father that passes to the hands of the apostle.

Our apostolic collaboration consists only in letting ourselves be touched by, and involved with, this loving plan of God. There is no other way of doing mission, without coming close to this source, to take and drink its water. This direct contact with the source, which is called 'holiness', is fundamental for us to be in contact with the mission of the Father. The first task of mission is to make the missionary a person of God, a contemplative. The missionary is the first land of mission, of the mission of the Word, Who through simple signs of bread and wine, of word and act, of friendship and joy, of pain and love, always comes to us and prepares His table in our

community. To announce the Kingdom is to let this state of grace, which lights up our lives, be seen. Mission is not primarily an activity but a spirituality; it is the apostolic life as conceived by Libermann.

### **13.1.3 Consecration at the Heart of Apostolic Life**

Paul VI in *Evangelica Testificatio* goes directly to the heart of the identity of consecrated life. According to him, the first task of consecrated life is to reveal the primacy of God to the world. All vocations reveal the mystery of Christ, but while the lay vocation reveals the face of Christ facing towards the world, the priestly vocation reveals the face of Christ facing towards the community, the consecrated vocation reveals the heart of Christ turned towards the Father. The consecrated religious lives for God and only for God. The first value of our vows is to sing the primacy of God in our lives.

### **13.1.4 Apostolic Life and History: Between Memory and Prophecy**

The great challenge facing us today is that of conversion from the past to the contemporary world. It is very evident that the great problem for consecrated life today is to translate its spiritual patrimony into valid apostolic projects, adapted to the new socio-cultural situation in which we live.

The great difficulty for us in consecrated life today is how to be signs of the beatitudes in the new emerging culture. How do we live the Spiritan charism in a world that has lost all the cultural means that belonged to us: family, school, culture, and social paradigms?

Today we are faced with extreme situations of need and urgency, but the sources that fed our spirituality, and

which were powerful in the past, are now neutralised, which creates a spiritual conformity at odds with our world in transformation. We live a protected spirituality, in contrast to the difficulties that the majority of the people on the margins face. We live on the defensive, if not protecting our patrimony, at least protecting our integrity. We lack the living of a solid spirituality of the margins, of justice and peace, of frontiers, of conflict and risk. We lack prophets.

## **13.2 MISSION AS GIFT: RECOVERING THE MYSTIQUE OF MISSION**

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After Vatican II, the evolution of the theology of mission based itself around three fundamental points: its Trinitarian source, its identification with the values of the Kingdom, and its incarnation in human history.

### **13.2.1 The Contemplative Aspect of Mission**

No one developed the theology of the Trinity as a source of mission like St. John. In the Prologue of his Gospel, John brings us directly to the source of mission: “In the beginning was the Word”. This Word came from the Trinity to progressively enter the human story. The mission of the Son comes from his divine sonship. It communicates the depths of the mystery of the Father. This sonship will enrich all of human history: John puts it in the deepest requirements of man. The symbols of bread and water, of light and life that identify the deepest needs of the person John identifies as the Son sent by the Father. “I am the bread which takes away hunger, the living water which takes away thirst, the light which illuminates the men of this world, the resurrection which brings life to overcome death”. Thus mission, on one side, is in the

heart of the Trinity of God; on the other, it has its geography in the heart of man.

### **13.2.2 Mission Promoting the Values of the Kingdom**

In the past, mission was seen, firstly, as the salvation of souls and then as the implantation of the Church. Nowadays, theologians place it in the area of proclaiming the values of the Kingdom. In fact, this was the mission of Christ: to proclaim and inaugurate the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of liberty, of fraternity, of justice, of peace, of love, of solidarity and of the total liberation of humankind.

This Kingdom touches all people and all creation. The mission of the Church places itself in this project of God, which surpasses the Church itself. God precedes the missionary in mission territories. The mission of the Church is not to bring God, but to discover and nurture this presence and action of God which precedes the missionary. It is He who infuses the seeds of the Word, present in the whole of creation, in the rites and cultures, in the hopes and aspirations of mankind. It is the role of the missionary to discover these values in the world where he finds himself, which show the passage of the Spirit among those people, before he himself arrived there. These mediations of God which precede the missionary are values which make sense of their lives, like culture, peace, justice, solidarity and communion. Inter-religious and intercultural dialogue are means for getting to know other places for the Spirit, other ways for Him to communicate the love of the Father, where the Church has not yet arrived, or could not be founded nor Christ be announced or understood. The missionary should not destroy these marks of the Spirit, but help to discern and

make clearer the values hidden by sin, by the weight of history and tradition, by situations of ignorance and underdevelopment.

### **13.2.3 Mission as Pilgrimage**

From the concept of mission as proclamation of the values of the Kingdom, which are the values of God in the human world, we learn that we have to find the path of mission in the lives of men and women of our time. History is the plan of God, where He reveals His secrets, His designs for man.

This 'man' is not an abstract person, without a face: it means real men and women, marked by the time in which they live, by the culture that identifies and distinguishes them in space and time. They are integrated into a web of concrete things like land, language, ethnicity, and culture. Mission must reach these people in their cultural roots, in their language, problems, and journey through life. Their conversion to the Gospel must not interfere with their identity nor take away their roots. In this way, the Church which will be born there, will be a daughter of those people and will have their style and their way of being in the world. The Christ who saves will be the Christ born in that Bethlehem called Nairobi, Kinshasa, Luanda or Sao Paulo. It will be the story of that people, that culture, that way of living that He will assume as He did in Galilee. It will be the situations that these people live in that will indicate the path that the mission will follow. It is a contextualised and faithful mission, with many aspects, like the paths taken by men and women in our days.



### 13.3 COMMUNITY, A GIFT FOR MISSION

The last part of the Superior General's report for this Chapter is totally dedicated to 'Our Life in Community'. It is perhaps the most significant section of the whole report and is the greatest challenge for the Congregation at this time.

#### 13.3.1 Community as Foundation for Mission

The community of Jesus with His disciples is the prototype of all religious communities. Jesus began the announcement of the Kingdom with the creation of a community. It was not simply the preparation of a work group or a school of future apostles, a type of traineeship to prepare apostles and afterwards send them out into the world. The community of Jesus was completely different from a rabbinical school. Community is the first step in the building up of the Kingdom.

In this community of Jesus, we already find the values of the Kingdom: the presence of Jesus, fraternity, mission, sharing, prayer, etc. But we also find the difficulties: the difficulty of seeing life with evangelical criteria, the temptation towards protagonism and domination over others, the struggle for power, the ethnic tensions, the cultural conflicts, the divergence of ideas, etc.

During His life, Jesus never achieved an ideal community nor even an acceptable community of disciples. From the point of view of concrete results, His Provincial in the next change of personnel would have moved Jesus Christ as a formator. However, Jesus did not lower the level of His ideal; the bar is always high. "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect". This group of disciples, with so little worthy of imitation, became the seed of the future Church, the beginning of a new project to transform the world.

### **13.3.2 Community is Personal**

The community of Jesus is a community centred on the person. The name of each disciple, the references to his family and place of origin, his roots and history are repeated many times. In fact, the community experience goes to the roots of our being. It is a bond. In community, everything begins with the understanding that we live a common grace, a shared gift. The first strength of the community is the giving of one's heart to it.

This fraternity is personal, that is, what it makes grow is not the work but the person. And so the primary direction of community is fraternity, not efficiency. In the religious community, Christ is not experienced in an Indian file, one behind the other, but in a circle, in the mutual gift of confreres facing each other.

### **13.3.3 Plurality as a Gift**

The community of Jesus was very varied with a publican, a true Israelite, a zealot. One has the impression that Jesus wanted to gather round Him all the diverging tendencies and factions of the Israel of His time. Judging by the stories in the Gospels, their temperaments were also very different.

Today, the Spiritan community is very diversified. The gifts of each one give the community its richness. The gifts of each one are the lights which illuminate the community. What can be said of the members of a community can be said of the cultures that characterise it. In the Congregation we have communities that have the gift of memory, of history, of living tradition: they keep the Congregation united to its roots. Other communities have the gift of youth, of new times, they are windows to the future. The communities of the elderly are cenacles of prayer and contemplation that do not allow the

Congregation to stray from the essential, from its sources. Our richness comes from this diversity, which is certainly the greatest gift that God has given us and that other times did not know.

### **13.3.4 Unity in Diversity**

The report of the Superior General tells us of the great diversity in the Congregation and the risks that this entails: works and structures (21 provinces, 11 groups, 12 districts, 6 foundations), cultures and countries (12 European, 25 African, 9 American and Caribbean, 2 Oceanic and 3 Asian), ages, traditions, understanding of mission. All of this makes essential the defence of a common denominator, capable of guaranteeing and safeguarding our unity. Only fidelity to the fundamental values of our Spiritan identity can save us. The charism is a gift of the Spirit that has the force of God to unite all the members in a common project. It is a prayerful reading of the Word of God. Outside this communion, it would be a private reading without the aid of the Holy Spirit. To consecrate oneself to God in religious life is to join a family to whom the Holy Spirit gives the gift of understanding and illuminating His loving plan. Only united in the cenacle can we learn to proclaim the marvels of the Lord in the right language. One is not a Spiritan in isolation.

## **13.4 SOME CHALLENGES FOR THE CONGREGATION TODAY**

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From a Biblical reflection on the Tower of Babel and the crises of big structures, we can identify some of the challenges facing the Congregation today.

### **13.4.1 The Recovery of the Prophetic Dimension of Consecrated Life**

In the Bible, the 'remnant' is not what is left over but those whom God chooses to relaunch His mission. It is a prophetic minority. Israel understood that to recover the sense of God it had to lose all its security. The times that we live in can help us to recover the core values of our consecration and, above all, the trust in God that is our only security and our future. In Israel it was a prophet, the Deutero Isaiah, who helped the people to reinterpret their history and recover the image of God. Only by recovering our prophetic dimension can we take a fresh look at what God has to say to us in the passing times.

### **13.4.2 The Recovery of the Charismatic Dimension of Consecrated Life**

Religious life arose in the Church as an essentially charismatic movement. It always enjoyed a certain liberty of spirit. This charismatic dimension was gradually lost by the creeping institutionalisation of the charisms and by the increase and multiplication of the apostolic commitments. The mission of religious life is not to do many things, but to reveal to the world God's way of being. The religious is primarily a master of the spiritual life, not to give classes in spirituality, but to reveal to the world a life animated by the Spirit. Our communities need to be places full of the experience of God.

### **13.4.3 The Recovery of the Mystery of Community**

Community is the entrance door for mission. It reveals the evangelical temperature of the group. To recover a community experience, it is not enough to return to regular observance as an ascetic and disciplined exercise.

It is necessary to experience the Gospel, the experience of a faith shared, the celebration of this faith, the sharing of goods and services and the fidelity to an accepted communal project. Libermann spent the last two years of his life struggling to save the life of the community, because the fervour of the early days and the apostolic necessities did not leave time for the living of a community life.

#### **13.4.4 The Challenge of the Minorities**

The emergence of minorities, especially prophetic minorities, has a key role in the history of salvation. This helps us to understand that there are provinces that cannot develop if they are wrapped up in old ways and cannot accept the challenge of renewing groups.

The youth of today are a minority in the Congregation in certain places. If they have not got space to express themselves, the congregation will lose one of its major forces for renewal.

Those that work in primary evangelisation, in situations of risk or in justice and peace are a minority, but if they have no voice, we run the risk of missing the train of history.

Significant experiences from the margins, within the charism of the Congregation, are minority experiences but they are also an inspiration for the whole Congregation.

In 1848, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit had a glorious past, an edifying history, a legal status, no lack of material things, but it was exhausted, without a visible future. And along came Libermann, with neither means nor past, but with a group of young men, a new spirit and a new vision for the future and it was the fusion of these two elements that saved and renewed the Congregation. Today we live in similar times: the older provinces have

their glorious past, their structures, their values, their legal status, their financial supports, but the new provinces have the new personnel, the new understanding of mission, they have the strong wind coming from the south. They are a grace and a gift offered to the Congregation which we must not devalue, but need to believe in, because that is where the future lies.



Finito di stampare  
nel mese di gennaio 2005  
dalla  
Scuola Tipografica S. Pio X  
Via degli Etruschi, 7  
00185 Roma



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